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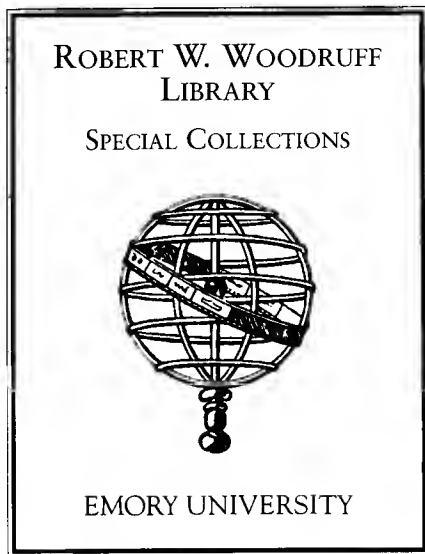
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## I.

### THE BASKET.

IN 1847 the Bois de Boulogne had not yet undergone the changes which now-a-days have made an English park of it. It was then a thin stretch of woodland, with but few roads and paths, dusty in summer, and muddy in winter, and the fashionable world knew no other promenade than the counterscarp of the fortifications. On a winter morning at that time the Porte Maillot was a completely deserted spot, where, at most, an early duellist might occasionally be seen.

Nevertheless, on Ash Wednesday, in that same year, 1847, there was an unusual stir in front of a small but rather fashionable restaurant at the corner of the Avenue de Neuilly and the Bois. Two open carriages and three or four of those high-hung cabriolets so much in favour among the gilded youths of the time, were stationed at the door. Bright lights shone from the windows of the first floor, and the stir of some joyous supper party could be heard. The white snow covering the road, and the gaunt, lofty trees, formed a singular frame to this pavilion full of animation and light. Dawn was just breaking—the dawn of a dark and rainy day—and a damp mist arose from the sodden soil. The horses, which had not been unharnessed, shivered under their rugs, while the servants in whose care they had been left stamped upon the ground, trying to warm their feet, and audibly cursing their masters.

“Does your viscount often have such notions as this?” said a tall footman with black whiskers, splendidly dressed in a green livery, with gold epaulets and a red cockade, to a groom of liliputian size.

“My master, the viscount, is not in the habit of communicating his ideas to me,” answered the groom, with an English accent and coolness.

“All the same,” remarked a coachman, dressed in a jacket which, by way of economy, had apparently been cut from an old overcoat of his master’s, “this isn’t the season to go and sup in the country; besides, everything must be enormously dear here.”

The tall footman shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, while the groom answered in a magisterial tone: “On the contrary, it is very fashionable. I lived for a year with Sir Arthur Pollock, and when we passed the season in London, we often went and finished the night at Hampton Court or Richmond.”

“Yes, that’s true, it’s fashionable,” rejoined the tall footman. “My master, the baron, said so only yesterday, before me.”

The dialogue was, however, at this moment, interrupted by a waiter

who, after setting the restaurant door ajar, and showing his face and white tie, called out: "Toby is wanted upstairs."

The groom thus summoned confided the thoroughbred horse which he had charge of to one of his companions, and ran up stairs, where he was greeted with an explosion of confused cries and contradictory orders. The revellers had arrived at that period of their orgie when enjoyment mainly shows itself in noise, and when extravagant frivolity takes the place of wit and repartee.

"Toby, you must saddle the horses of Coralie's calash."

"Toby, I want the baron's roans harnessed in tandem fashion to my trap."

"Toby, bring us some donkeys to ride on."

All these demands, made at once, were listened to by the groom with perfect indifference; motionless and erect, he seemed in no hurry to obey them, but at last a clear and sonorous voice, his master's, rapidly articulated the words: "Hired horses for every one in half an hour."

The groom bowed and retired in so perfect a manner that the admiration of the party was displayed in loud applause. "That is a well-trained servant!" cried a personage of rather vulgar appearance, with a massive neck and shoulders, and displaying in his button-hole the ribbons of various foreign orders. "Only Sartilly can pick up grooms of that kind. From what English county did you get him?"

"He came from Normandy," Toby's master answered.

"That is not possible!" said the decorated man.

"His mother was English," rejoined Sartilly rather impatiently; "but don't let us speak any more of my groom; we had better think of arranging our morning programme."

"Yes, that's it! Bravo for the viscount!" exclaimed a couple of women both at once.

"Then, ladies and gentlemen," continued Sartilly, "it is decided that we shall cross the Bois de Boulogne on horseback, and breakfast at the Black Head restaurant at Saint Cloud."

"Yes, yes," cried every one, with the exception of a tall, sallow youth, who seemed absorbed in contemplating a black-haired damsel seated near him. However he finally roused himself to exclaim: "It seems to me, gentlemen, that after a night spent at a ball, it is tiring enough to come to the Porte Maillot for supper, and that it isn't worth while——"

"That's all very well, Versoix," interrupted one of the company seated at the other end of the table. "Say rather that you are afraid of diminishing your aunt's inheritance."

"Oh! I don't possess as many millions as Monsieur de Mensignac," replied the sallow young man.

"Apropos of Mensignac, why didn't he come to sup with us?" interrupted the decorated personage.

"He left me at about two o'clock at the opera ball to give his arm to a woman in a domino who wore a violet bow on her shoulder," answered Toby's master, "and although he told me he would join us here, I very much doubt his coming."

"Sartilly doubts everything," said a lady of the party.

"But why shouldn't Monsieur de Mensignac come?"

"Because I recognised the woman in the domino, whom he went off with."

"And who was she?"

"Why, that beautiful foreigner who drives every day in the Champs Elysées in a carriage drawn by four horses unequalled in Paris."

There was a general murmur of incredulity.

"I saw two curls of her hair from under her hood," replied Sartilly.

"Only the women in Titian's pictures have hair of that same shade."

"But people say she is unapproachable," remarked the sallow young man, "and more than that, she is almost always escorted by an atrociously jealous husband."

"That's perfectly true, my dear Versoix; and her husband is a sort of mulatto, with wicked eyes, and sharp teeth pointed like a wolf's. However, I suppose that Mensignac has found some secret means of tanning him."

"It is not so surprising," said a feminine member of the party; "your friend Mensignac is also a mysterious customer, and it is quite natural that he should hobnob with that Caribbean mulatto. Who knows if they don't conspire together?"

"Say at once that Mensignac is a coiner," laughingly answered Edmond de Sartilly.

"Well, speaking of a man who often disappears for a month at a time without any one knowing where he goes, you will acknowledge that all suppositions are admissible," young Versoix remarked, rather bitterly. "It is true that his sister Jeanne de Mensignac remains alone at home during his absence."

Sartilly flushed, and, with an angry glance, was going to give a fierce answer to this remark which appeared to wound him to the quick, when Toby's return made a fortunate diversion.

The groom announced that the horses were ready, and the gay party rose hurriedly from table. Each one had had enough of the close atmosphere of the restaurant, and felt the need of breathing the fresh air. Day had now dawned; the remains of the supper and the faces of the revellers pale with fatigue presented a sorry spectacle in the early light. It was the moment when sleep endeavours to assert her rights, and robust as men were in those days it required no little energy to mount on horseback, especially at such an hour and in such weather. Toby had done wonders—he had found horses that could gallop, saddles that were almost clean, and even riding-habits for the ladies of the party. Sartilly, who had taken command of the expedition, ordered the servants to stable the carriage-horses and wait at the Porte Maillot for the return of the riding party. Half an hour afterwards, the little band was gaily cantering in the direction of Saint Cloud.

The Bois de Boulogne was deserted, and the wide roads were covered with snow as far as the eye could reach. The sun had begun to shine through the trees which it brightened with a reddish light; the weather had cleared; it was a fine winter morning, and the party, revived by the freshness of the air, soon recovered all their wonted good humour. They talked, they laughed, they sang, and cantered along, reaching in an hour's time a road that led to the bridge of Saint Cloud. Sartilly thereupon proposed to quicken their pace so that they might the more speedily reach the restaurant for breakfast.

The road the party followed was virtually deserted, as only one man could be seen walking along some thirty paces ahead. He wore a long dark coat and a broad-brimmed hat, and carried a large covered basket on his arm, looking just like some Parisian shopkeeper going to divert

himself in the suburbs ; and as the basket seemed to contain provisions, it might—had the season been summer—have been supposed that this unknown pedestrian was going to some country picnic. Suddenly a wild idea passed through Sartilly's brain. He laughed and whispered to the fat decorated baron, who was trotting beside him, and the latter speedily transmitted an order to the rest of the party, which was coming on in the rear. The pedestrian had turned round for a moment on hearing the noise of the horses, and the riders then saw that he was old, and had long white whiskers. However, he quietly continued his walk without bestowing any further attention upon the little troop behind him.

This was what Sartilly wanted, he suddenly urged his horse into a gallop, and brushing past the stranger, seized hold of his basket, and carried it off at full speed towards Saint Cloud. The old man at first remained motionless with surprise, and the party, who had expected that he would hurry after Sartilly, and that they would derive great amusement from such a ridiculous chase, were doomed to disappointment. In fact, although the pedestrian's stupefaction only lasted for a few moments he neither ran after the viscount nor did he cry out. With a vigorous bound he cleared the ditch that bordered the road and plunged into the wood, immediately vanishing from sight.

"That man cares very little for his breakfast," said the baron, bursting out laughing. "The poor fellow took us for a band of robbers, that's very certain."

"Sartilly is waiting for us yonder," said young Versoix.

Indeed, the viscount, after galloping onward for a few moments, had stopped in the middle of the road, displaying with a gesture of triumph the prize he had so oddly gained. In an instant he was surrounded by the joyous troop, and there was a general cry of curiosity.

"Be patient," said Sartilly, laughing. "I am going to open this mysterious basket, and we will see what this stranger was carrying to his wife for breakfast." Thereupon lifting the cover of the basket, he took out, with comic solemnity, a number of very fine napkins. "I really think the prize will be a very poor one," said the viscount, continuing his inspection ; "there's plenty of table-linen here, but so far no provisions."

Meanwhile all eyes were fixed upon Sartilly, who at last unfolded a final wrapper of black material. A moment later an exclamation of horror burst from every mouth. At the bottom of the basket there lay a human head. Yielding to a very natural movement of disgust, Sartilly let the basket fall, the head rolling with its wrappings to the ground. No one moved—mute with surprise and horror, the riders remained as if petrified in their saddles. It was a strange picture, fantastic even in its setting of winter scenery. The wood was silent, the road deserted, and for a time they all looked at each other without speaking. Sartilly was the first to shake off the torpor which, after a terrible and unforeseen event, benumbs one's will and paralyses one's movements. A new idea had just occurred to him.

"The murderer ! the man who was carrying the basket," he cried, raising himself in his saddle ; "he must be pursued—he must be arrested."

"He rushed into the wood on the left," said the baron, pointing to the thickets which bordered the road.

"Ah ! ah !" said Sartilly more quietly. "He went in over there, you say ?"

"Yes, at fifty paces from here," cried the two women of the party at the same time.

"Ah, well! then we have him. I know the Bois de Boulogne. That stretch of woodland where the brigand has hidden himself is not more than three hundred yards in width. I shot over it with a friend of mine, a deputy, early this winter. It forms a triangle, and as there are three roads to watch, we will divide the work between us. You, baron, gallop along the road to the left; Versoix must remain here to keep guard in case the man should retrace his steps, which hardly seems likely. I will take the opposite round, and, if necessary, enter the wood and force the monster out of it. The general rendezvous will be at this point. Before twenty minutes are over the hunt will be finished."

The baron, very much flattered by the mission that Sartilly had confided to him, made no objection, but started his horse in the direction indicated. However, the two women declared that it was necessary to warn the police at Saint Cloud, and they thereupon rode off towards the bridge; so that Versoix was left quite alone, Sartilly and the baron having already disappeared.

The young fellow, left to his reflections, looked in terror at the head which had been perforce entrusted to his care, and believed that he was running the greatest danger in his post as sentinel. He was the son of a watchmaker in Geneva, who had left him a rather large fortune, with solid principles of economy. Having been only lately launched into Parisian life, he had not yet been able to lay aside the instincts of order natural to his countrymen, and at this moment he bitterly regretted having joined Sartilly's party, and felt an overwhelming desire to ride back to Paris.

There was really some foundation for his fears. The horrible old man whom Sartilly and the baron were pursuing might wish to recover the head which had been taken from him. Perhaps he was there, crouching in the wood and ready to rush out like a wild beast. The luckless Versoix listened, trembling, to the various sounds which proceeded from the thickets, and, not daring to alight, he sat in his saddle in the middle of the road. Each moment he more and more distinctly heard Sartilly calling the baron from the other side of the thicket, and it was evident that the courageous viscount was pushing into the wood, forcing his way through the bushes, amid which the fugitive was probably hidden. The baron, on his side, must have entered the thicket, and if the owner of the basket was still hiding in this triangular stretch of woodland, the only point he could escape by was the corner where young Versoix was stationed.

The timid Switzer scanned with an anxious eye the road leading to Saint Cloud, for it was in that direction that help would come, and he longed to see it appear. But a loud crackling of branches and the noise of hasty footsteps made him turn his head, and almost immediately a man appeared at the edge of the wood. There was no possibility of making a mistake, for it was really the fugitive. He stopped short on a bank which overlooked the road, and gazed around him. His face was in full view—a pale and angular face with long white whiskers, and lighted up by black eyes, the ferocious expression of which positively terrified Versoix. Thus standing on the bank, stooping as though ready to bound forward, the strange old man had absolutely the appearance of a hunted wolf about to turn and give fight to his pursuers. At first he had not observed the

Switzer, as the latter had drawn back a few steps on seeing him; but it was only the affair of a second. At a glance, the fugitive took in the sentinel on horseback and the basket still lying on the road where it had fallen; but he could not see the head, for it was lying at the side of the avenue, and a large tuft of grass hid it from his view. Meanwhile the noise in the wood drew nearer and nearer, Sartilly's voice being distinctly heard as he urged his companion on: "Make haste, baron! This way—to the left. I saw him; we will catch him. Versoix guards the corner."

The fugitive waited no longer, but sprang forward with prodigious vigour, crossing the road in three bounds. His first leap brought him near to the basket, which he picked up in mid flight; the second carried him half way across the road; and with the third he reached the opposite ditch, rushing into an inextricable thicket of thorns and briars.

This feat was accomplished before Versoix had even thought of urging his horse forward or of uttering a cry. Almost as soon as the old man had disappeared, Sartilly and the baron emerged from the wood. "Where is he?" the two pursuers cried, at the same time. Versoix could only point, with a despairing gesture, to the thick brushwood into which the assassin had just plunged. The viscount, quite exhausted by his efforts, swore loudly at Versoix's awkwardness and cowardice. His hands were torn and scratched by the briars, and the state of his attire showed that he had not spared himself. The baron was in a similar condition; and indeed both pursuers had courageously alighted from their horses, and had forced their way on foot into the wood. Their plan would have certainly succeeded, as they had unearthed the fugitive, who had only escaped, thanks to Versoix's cowardice. Sartilly was thinking of again pushing into the brushwood, when the Switzer announced that he saw the gendarmes approaching from the direction of Saint Cloud; and, indeed, quite a large party could be seen at the end of the wide road.

"Enough hunting for this morning," said Sartilly, seating himself at the edge of the road. "As we have failed in capturing the murderer, the police must take the matter in hand, and at all events the scamp cannot be very far off."

"As for myself," said the baron, "I am just as well pleased not to finish the work. But what an adventure! Can you understand it at all?"

"The secret is there," muttered Sartilly, pointing to the black stuff that partially hid the head. "But how about the basket?" he cried, suddenly.

"He carried it off," replied poor Versoix, flushing, and feeling quite ashamed of having fulfilled his mission so badly.

"It was really a piece of unheard-of audacity," said the baron, almost tempted to admire the old man who had been bold enough to return and fetch this compromising proof of his criminality.

"Yes, it is very strange," repeated Sartilly.

But the end of the affair was at hand, for the measured steps of the gendarmes could now be heard distinctly, and Versoix started to meet them. As if anxious to make amends for his former negligence, he at once began to explain the facts of the case to the commissary of police, who was marching at the head of his men. "I know all about it already. Let me see the head," remarked the magistrate coolly. And as the Switzer insisted upon the necessity of immediately searching the underwood in which the old man had now taken refuge, the commissary quietly added:

"It is useless. I know the spot; there is a marsh behind that patch of wood, and if the murderer has gone in there he cannot come out without our permission."

The two pursuers, hitherto seated on the bank beside the road, rose up on the arrival of the commissary, and the viscount pointed out the severed head. A man who looked like a detective at once approached, stooped down and raised the black wrapper. Sartilly's heart beat as if it would burst. On first opening the basket he had caught but a glimpse of the pale bloody head, and had not tried to distinguish the features. Now, however, a vague presentiment had struck him, and it seemed to him that his future life would be mixed up with this strange story.

The agent removed the wrapper with that mechanical calmness which the habitual exercise of police functions imparts, and he stood so as to conceal his operations from the lookers-on; but when he had finished he drew back quickly, as if wishing to produce a sensation. It was a woman's head that lay upon the snow, livid, but still beautiful, with that appalling beauty that follows death. The open, fixed eyes still seemed to look at one; the features were not contracted, but the mouth was open, as if to give vent to a last cry, and long coils of loosened hair wound round about this colourless face. A ray of sunshine suddenly bursting out lighted up this thick hair, which was of a strange tint—a tint of ruddy gold—and Sartilly could not suppress a cry of surprise.

"Golden hair!" he cried. "That's the domino of last night—the foreigner of the Champs Élysées!"

This exclamation seemed to strike the commissary, whose face suddenly assumed the expression peculiar to persons charged by the government with the apprehension of criminals. He might not as yet have formed any positive suspicion, but his eyes were already questioning. This was noticed by the viscount, and, in spite of his emotion, he understood that it was necessary for him to explain himself.

"I am sure that I am not mistaken," he said, in a voice which he tried to render calm. "The victim of this odious crime is known to all Paris. Her name is Madame de Noreff, and she lived with her husband in a handsome mansion at the corner of the Boulevard des Invalides and the Rue de Varennes. These gentlemen will testify to it."

"Who are these gentlemen?" the commissary asked, as after a short silence he drew from his pocket a note-book and prepared to take some notes.

"Baron Polard, proprietor; Charles Versoix, of Geneva," answered the viscount's two companions.

The names were inscribed in the official's memorandum book, and the viscount, without waiting to be questioned, gave his name, Edmond de Sartilly, his title and residence.

"I will ask you by-and-by, gentlemen, for an exact account of what has taken place. The most important matter at this moment is to lay our hands on the murderer," said the commissary of police.

"He is there," said Versoix, pointing to the brushwood.

"Then he will not be there long," was the reply. "Sergeant, post two of your men on the road and go round with the others."

The stretch of woodland in which the fugitive had now sought refuge bordered the road for a distance of sixty paces or so. Beyond it extended a marshy meadow, where it seemed impossible to venture without sinking deeply in the mud. So it seemed as if the murderer had got into an inextricable difficulty, and that his capture was simply a question of time.



The commissary commanded the manœuvres in the peremptory tone of a man who is not sorry to give a lesson to the ignorant, evidently wishing to show Sartilly and his friends how the police made sure work of it in a case like this.

The gendarmes surrounded the thicket, while three detectives entered it, each with a loaded cane in his hand, and making a much closer search than that undertaken by the viscount and the baron. Ten minutes afterwards, however, they reappeared with long faces; one alone returned with a prize. It was the basket, which he had found on the brink of a well half filled up, which was situated in the centre of the thicket. As for the fugitive, he had escaped without leaving any other trace of his flight.

The commissary, very much disconcerted by his failure, made them begin the search again, directing them himself, but without a better result. The mysterious old man had vanished like a phantom, and his appearance might have passed for a dream, had not the severed head been there to recall the sad reality. The lookers-on could not help admitting that the perpetrator of an abominable crime had, for the present, escaped pursuit; however, the commissary declared that it would not be difficult to discover the truth, as the victim could be identified.

"The man must have escaped before our arrival," he added, addressing himself to the gendarmes; and after making this remark, intended to soothe the wounded pride of his men, he rapidly proceeded to examine the basket. He took out first the fine napkins which had covered the head, and found that they bore no marks, and finally he produced an article that no one had seen when the basket was first opened. It was a red morocco pocket-book, which seemed to have been hastily rifled, for it was empty and torn in many places.

"Oh, oh!" said the commissary, in a satisfied tone, "here is something that will help us. There is a coat of arms stamped upon the cover of this case. It is incredible how thoughtless murderers are," he added, as if speaking to himself.

While the worthy man was examining this prize, Sartilly watched him anxiously. A vague instinct impelled the viscount to think that the escutcheon upon the pocket-book was known to him, and at the same time an unaccountable feeling made him anxious not to intervene. He felt extremely reluctant to touch this article which had been in the bloody hands of the murderer, and yet, in spite of himself, he was drawn to it by feverish curiosity. He already had a question upon his lips, but his natural good sense restrained him from asking it. Happily, it occurred to him that it is always imprudent to meddle too much with police affairs, and this strange adventure would, as it was, probably expose him to a great many disagreeable interrogatories without his needing to provoke them. He therefore remained silent, and while the commissary gave orders to carry the head and basket away, his ideas took another turn, his imagination rapidly recalling all the episodes of this strange adventure, whilst with singular clearness he realised the striking points of it.

The old man, after first rushing into the wood, had not tried to escape, although he certainly had had ample time to do so; thus a powerful interest must have retained him there, and still more, he had braved the danger of almost certain arrest in order to recover the basket. Was it not evident, then, that the necessity of again obtaining possession of various important papers had alone induced him to expose himself to such manifest peril?

Sartilly felt certain that the pocket-book had been near his hands when he had removed the napkins, his surprise and disgust having alone prevented him from seeing it. When the head fell to the ground the pocket-book and the important papers it contained must have remained at the bottom of the basket. The incredible audacity of the murderer might be explained in that way. That pocket-book had held his secret. But what secret? Could this horrible old man of the Bois de Boulogne indeed be the husband of the beautiful foreigner with the golden hair—that Madame de Noreff whom Sartilly thought he had seen at the opera ball a few hours previously? He and the baron had merely caught a glimpse of the mysterious murderer. He had escaped too quickly for them to be able to recognise him. Versoix alone had had an opportunity of seeing him face to face; but the young Switzer, only lately arrived from Geneva, and knowing very little of Parisian life, had probably never seen the ferocious husband of whom the others had spoken at the close of the supper near the Porte Maillot.

"I am a fool to worry my brains in this way," said Sartilly, after five minutes' painful reflection. "It is the business of the police to clear up this affair. I must have been mistaken at the ball, for surely my friend Mensignac has nothing to do with this hideous tragedy. To satisfy myself I will call at his house this morning."

While the viscount was thus trying to tranquillise his mind, the commissary of police was preparing to leave. "I must go back to Saint Cloud at once," he said, in a less formal manner than heretofore. "I have no time to lose, as it will be necessary for me to proceed to Paris to give an account of this important affair. It is useless to remind you, gentlemen, that the investigating magistrate selected to inquire into this case will very soon have need of your testimony."

"We shall be at his orders, and also quite disposed to do justice to your zeal," said the portly baron, who was always delighted to bring himself forward. "In the meanwhile, will you permit me to ask what you think of this incredible discovery?"

"It is very difficult as yet to give an opinion," complaisantly replied the magistrate, flattered by the baron's praises. "We have, perhaps, put our hands on what may prove a far-famed crime, although I have sometimes seen an equally strange affair turn out to be a mere trifle."

"But the head—the basket?"

"Who knows if that man may not simply have been a surgeon carrying home this head which he meant to dissect, and who was frightened by your attack and pursuit?"

"That is true," said the baron and Versoix at the same time, for they felt inclined to accept any explanation whatever.

"This gentleman may be mistaken," added the commissary, pointing to Sartilly, who did not seem to have any faith in his suggestion; "all fair hair is alike."

The viscount was going to answer, for an inexplicable feeling prompted him to meddle with the affair, and it was only with difficulty that he could restrain the violent desire he felt to look again at the head which the detectives had just wrapped up in its black covering. However, the sound of a horse trotting quickly along the wide avenue arrested his attention, and his surprise was very great when he saw his groom Toby mounted on the bay horse he drove in his cabriolet. The little fellow was coming along at full speed, and only something very serious could have

induced him to saddle and mount so valuable a horse, exclusively intended for a carriage. Sartilly, quite uneasy at the sight, advanced to the middle of the road, and made a gesture to the groom, who reined in his horse with a celerity worthy of the admiration of Baron Polard. Erect and motionless, he remained within two paces of his master, with one hand raised to his cap, and the other holding the reins.

"What is the matter?" said Sartilly in English, instinctively preferring not to have too many listeners to the news that Toby might have brought him.

"A letter that a footman of the Marquis de Mensignac brought to the Porte Maillot, desiring me not to lose a moment in handing it to you, sir."

"Jeanne's handwriting," murmured Sartilly, taking the letter quickly; "this is singular!"

He broke the seal, and read with emotion these words, written in a fine and trembling hand: "I must see you this very day. Come."

There was no signature, but the viscount knew the handwriting of this epistle, for he turned pale, and gave his orders to Toby in a broken voice:

"Get down and lengthen Ralph's stirrups; I am going to mount him. You must proceed to Saint Cloud with these gentlemen, and hire a horse there to bring the cabriolet back to Paris."

The groom obeyed without saying a word, and Sartilly leapt into the saddle without remarking the singular expression of Toby's eyes, which were fixed upon the police-officers. However, Toby's astonishment at seeing this array in the middle of the Bois de Boulogne was not surprising, so that no one noticed it. The viscount drew near to the party to shake hands with his friends, and to apologise to the commissary for his sudden departure, which was caused, he said, by urgent business. The magistrate accepted his excuses very graciously, but begged him to give him a little further information before leaving. He wished to know if the viscount recognised the coat of arms stamped on the pocket-book, which he held out to him for inspection.

"Azure, a chevron or, surmounted by a marquis's coronet," rapidly said the baron, very desirous of showing his heraldic knowledge.

Sartilly, on his side, had extended his hand to take hold of the pocket-book, but on hearing the baron's words he started back quickly, and said to the commissary: "I do not know that coat of arms." He had become lividly pale, and digging his spurs into Ralph's sides he galloped off furiously, muttering these words: "Strange; Mensignac's coat of arms—Jeanne's letter—there is some trouble, and I am afraid I shall get there too late."

## II.

### THE HOME OF THE MENSIGNACS.

THE fever for demolishing which followed upon the Revolution of February, 1848, has long since swept away the superb mansion of the Mensignac family. However, at the close of Louis Philippe's reign, the vast pile still overlooked the Seine, from the high deserted plateau which, under the Restoration, received a Spanish name in memory of the war of 1823. The Trocadéro had, in the days of the First Empire, been chosen as the site of the palace of the King of Rome. The catastrophe of 1814

prevented the realisation of Napoleon's idea, but it did not stop the work undertaken about 1811 by the General Marquis de Mensignac.

Nobly descended from an old Gascon stock, the son of an emigrant who had died at Coblenz, the marquis, by the favour of the first consul, had been able to restore his house and recover part of his wealth in return for services loyally offered. A captain of dragoons at Austerlitz, Adhémar de Mensignac had been made brigadier-general after the battle of Wagram, and the emperor, at the time of his marriage with Marie Louise, had increased his protégé's fortune by favouring his marriage with a noble and wealthy Austrian damsel, whose father had accompanied the new empress to Paris. The marquis wished to prove his devotion to the empire by building a magnificent mansion near the ground consecrated to the young Napoleon. But the empire fell before the building was finished, and the general did not inhabit it until 1817. Although his services under Napoleon, "the usurper," at first made the royal court look coldly upon him, the marquis rallied to the Bourbons in 1820, having remained long enough in retirement to gain a reputation for fidelity to misfortune. Then remembering opportunely enough that his ancestors had figured in the Crusades, he went to court and was soon taken into the favour of the king, who raised him to the rank of lieutenant-general and peer of France. After this he led an apparently easy life, and was a prominent personage in Paris until his death, which took place shortly after the revolution of July, 1830.

He left a son eighteen years old, and a daughter in the cradle—a daughter whose mother had died in giving her birth. The son, whose name was Roger, became master of a fortune which, although it had been impaired by parental extravagance, was still considerable. He showed, upon his entrance into society, a firmness of character and an amount of prudence seldom witnessed among young men of his age. But it was whispered that this precocious maturity was owing to sad events, as the general's home had not been a happy one, particularly during the last years of his life. There had been, it was said, unpleasant circumstances which young Roger must have involuntarily witnessed.

These were little more, however, than vague rumours, as the general passed most of his time at court, at the opera, and at fashionable clubs. He received no one at home on an intimate footing, though the mansion was opened two or three times during the winter for luxurious entertainments given to the aristocracy, the marchioness presiding at them with timid grace. This was all that Paris knew of her. Her death made more noise than her life, and some persons did not hesitate to say that grief, caused by preference given to a rival, had contributed to her premature demise. The neighbours and petty shopkeepers around the Trocadéro spoke of tragic scenes which had taken place in the Mensignac mansion, and they had always looked upon the general as a kind of Blue Beard. The absurdity of these ridiculous stories was, perhaps, the only thing that kept them alive; however, after the death of the marquis and his wife, the house still retained its mysterious reputation.

And yet nothing could be more simple and open than the life led by those who inhabited it. Roger de Mensignac devoted himself to the education of his young sister with almost paternal love. Jeanne had grown up under the same roof as her brother, and was now an accomplished young girl. An English governess, who had taught her in her childhood, now remained with her as a companion. Miss Georgina Fassitt

had at first come into the family as a reader to the marchioness, about a year before the latter's unfortunate demise, and her conduct since the death of her employers had been in formal contradiction with the reports accusing her of having caused trouble in the general's household. Indeed she showed the warmest affection for Jeanne. In her youth she had been strikingly beautiful, but at her present age malicious suppositions were out of the question. However, she herself was not so much the object of slander. Damaging conjectures were more especially made concerning young Roger de Mensignac.

Of high attainments and most refined in his tastes and habits, he had the great fault of not liking society—a fault that society never pardons. For some years after his father's death, he had lived as most young men live, but gradually retiring from the resorts of pleasure, he now had but one intimate friend, Edmond de Sartilly, the companion of his childhood. Even this friend was ignorant of certain circumstances of Roger's life, as the young marquis sometimes disappeared for entire months at a time, no one knowing where he was. From this circumstance arose all sorts of runours, some people even going so far as to accuse Roger of various guilty practices undefined. It had always been believed that under the Trocadero hill, there were some large subterranean caverns, and persons were not wanting to affirm that Roger de Mensignac frequented them for various mysterious purposes.

Sartilly did not know what to think of these suppositions; but he rather believed that the frequent absences of his friend were due to some great passion for a woman of high position. The only mystery that seemed patent to him was that concerning Roger's fortune. Coming as he did into the possession of his father's property at eighteen years of age, and having, since his majority, acted as guardian to his sister, Roger had always lived like a man possessed of an income of at least a hundred thousand francs; and yet Sartilly did not know of his holding any other property than the Mensignac mansion, which was a source of expense, not one of revenue. Roger did not gamble or speculate, and, besides, Sartilly discovered by chance that he had no money invested in the State funds. Commercial stocks and shares were not known in those days, the modern limited liability companies not yet having sprung into existence.

The viscount, however, attached very little importance to the mystery of the Mensignac fortune, for he felt a strong friendship for Roger, and this feeling, dating from infancy, had been increased for the last two years by a more powerful one: Roger was the brother of an adorable young girl whom he, Sartilly, loved, and who to all appearance returned his affection. Jeanne had just reached her eighteenth year. Sartilly was the only visitor received at the Mensignac mansion, and although there was a considerable difference in their ages, a reciprocal sympathy drew them together. Roger had always favoured the marriage of his sister with his best friend, so that there seemed no obstacle to the union of the young couple, who, in the meanwhile, lived on that charming footing of intimacy which naturally establishes itself between a pure young girl and the man who is to be her husband.

On the day before the adventure in the Bois de Boulogne, Sartilly had spent three hours with Jeanne and her brother, forming pleasant plans for the future. Roger had never seemed more jovial. He had playfully teased the lovers, and had announced a serious conference for the next day, to settle preliminary matters and fix the date for the marriage. Then, on

leaving the house, the viscount had dined at his club, and had afterwards been enticed to the opera ball and the foolish Porte Maillot party.

Very much agitated by the exciting affair in which he had just taken part, Edmond experienced on receiving Jeanne's letter that anguish of heart which seems to be a forerunner of misfortune, and while galloping swiftly towards Paris his head was full of gloomy suppositions. Still, at moments, it seemed to him as if all he had gone through had been a dream. The bloody head, the torn pocket-book, the frightful old man, seemed like so many childish visions that fever had produced in his brain; and when he saw the roof of the Mensignac mansion towering above the trees in the garden, he had almost forgotten these funereal realities, and only thought of Jeanne, who was perhaps exposed to some danger, since she had sent for him. A second's delay might destroy their happiness, and so he spurred his steed onward, longing to reach the goal.

As the furious galloping of his horse resounded over the pavement of this deserted part of Paris, the gate of the mansion was opened, and a footman came forward to take charge of Ralph. Noting this, the viscount concluded that he was impatiently expected.

"Has not the marquis come home?" he quickly asked, while throwing the reins to the servant.

"No, the marquis is not at home just now, sir," the footman answered, very calmly, "but he came in this morning at about three o'clock."

This unhopèd-for reply reassured Sartilly in a measure, and he added, in a steadier voice, "Can I see Mademoiselle de Mensignac?"

"She told me to ask you to enter the library, where she will join you, sir."

Sartilly rapidly crossed the court-yard and proceeded towards the staircase which led to Roger's rooms. The library was a high and narrow gallery, lighted by large windows, and extending along the southern front of the house. It was reached by a door opening near the marquis's bedroom, the wall at the further end having neither window nor portal. In fact this wall formed the limit of the house.

The library was Roger's favourite room, and many charming evenings had Edmond passed there, seated at the wide oak table, where Jeanne, in spite of the smoke of the cigars, had taken her place beside the friends. Here, all spoke of the master—the new novel still lying open, the engravings and water-colour sketches spread out here and there, the large books piled upon the stands; and one might have sworn that Roger de Mensignac had just left the room, for upon a white sheet of paper there lay a pen still wet with ink. With this peaceful picture before him Sartilly's spirits rose, for it seemed to him that no misfortune could have entered his friend's home. Thus reflecting, he slowly walked along the gallery, and had almost fully regained his equanimity when he stepped upon something soft lying on the parquet. Stooping to see what it was, he could not restrain a cry of surprise, for his hand took hold of a lock of hair, the golden hue of which was made brighter by a passing sun ray. He had not recovered from his emotion when the library door was opened, and recognising the light step of Jeanne de Mensignac, he threw the lock of hair aside. The young girl came quickly in, holding out her hand, and asking him, in an agitated voice: "Have you seen Roger?"

"I thought I should find him here," replied Sartilly.

Jeanne gave a gesture of discouragement, and sank down in an arm-chair. Her pale face, and eyes reddened by weeping, expressed so much

anguish that Sartilly drew near to support her ; but repulsing him gently, she signed to him to sit down beside her.

"What has happened, my dear Jeanne?" said the viscount, grieved to the bottom of his heart. He waited a long time for an answer. The poor girl had at first borne up against grief, but in the presence of the man she loved her forced energy gradually gave way, and at last she burst into sobs.

"Dear Jeanne ! in the name of heaven speak to me."

"My brother is dead !"

The viscount experienced a keen shock on hearing this unexpected announcement, and the frightful event of the morning passed, vision-like, before his mind. It was then true ; the pocket-book found in the basket in the Bois de Boulogne had been torn from his murdered friend. Jeanne, whom he adored, was before him, wringing her hands in despair, and he lacked the courage to reassure her.

"However, I saw Roger last night," he murmured, as if speaking to himself.

"Where ? at what hour ?" said the young girl, eagerly.

"At about two o'clock, at the opera ball. Yes, it was two o'clock," said Sartilly, in the tone of a man trying to recall his recollections.

"At three o'clock he was here."

"But, then, what you tell me is impossible ! he could not have been killed in this house."

"You must have known that he went out again, as you sent for him !"

"What ! you say that I sent some one here for Roger ?"

"Yes. It is quite true," said Jeanne, raising her eyes, full of tears, to her lover's face.

"Who came here from me ?"

"Your groom Toby."

A painful thought crossed Edmond's mind. Was it possible that Jeanne had suddenly lost her senses ? This fear gave him strength to question her more calmly.

"Jeanne," he said to her, in a voice that trembled, in spite of his efforts to control it, "you know that I love you with my whole heart, and you know also that I look upon Roger like a brother. When my father was killed in 1830 in defending the Louvre, yours welcomed me as a son, and since the death of General de Mensignac, Roger has inherited the affection I bore his father. If he is in danger, I will save him ; if he is dead, I will avenge him. But I must know everything."

These words seemed to make a great impression on the young girl, who, raising her head and wiping the tears from her eyes, gave Edmond a look full of love and gratitude. Then, while collecting her scattered thoughts, she pushed back the long ringlets which had fallen in disorder over her brow, remaining for a moment serious and silent.

"I remember now," she said, slowly. "Roger stayed at home with me till quite late ; we had been reading some verses of Lamartine together, and I had cried. He was gay, more gay than usual, and consoled me kindly. Gradually, however, he became melancholy ; he spoke to me of our mother and then of you, and I remember his saying that our marriage should take place very soon." Jeanne blushed while saying these last words, and evidently hesitated ; however, making an effort, she continued : "He wished, he said, to arrange affairs with the notary this morning, and he repeated several times, in a peculiar manner, that he should not always be

here, and that he did not wish you to marry a woman without a fortune. I tell you these things, Edmond, because it may be important for you to know everything that happened before he left."

"When did Roger leave you?" interrupted Edmond, who had been listening to this narrative with feverish attention.

"It was near midnight; and before he left he told me he should return rather late, and wanted me to meet him in the library this morning at ten o'clock. I recall at this moment his last words: 'It will be very dull to hear the contract read; but at eighteen years old—your age, my dear Jeanne—you must begin to accustom yourself to serious things.' Then," continued the young girl, in a broken voice, "he kissed me, and I felt a tear fall on my forehead."

"But he returned, you told me."

"What I am going to tell you may seem to you almost improbable, and perhaps you will scarcely believe me," replied Jeanne, sadly.

Sartilly held out his hand with so frank a gesture that she gave him hers, and in a low voice continued: "I believe in presentiments, Edmond, for I am a woman; and after Roger left me, I felt overwhelmed by unconquerable sadness. All kinds of mournful ideas sprang up in my mind—it seemed as if a great misfortune threatened me, and a secret voice whispered to me that the quiet evening I had just spent with my brother would be the last. I tried to reason with myself, but the idea of death always returned to me. I tried to sleep, but I found it impossible to do so—the least noise made me start, and I felt a nervous excitement I had never previously experienced. I did not suffer, but I felt afraid, and after passing some hours in this way, I fell into a painful slumber, from which I awoke with a start. You know that Roger's rooms can be seen plainly from my windows, and suddenly I saw a bright light shining in the library where we now are. At that sight, I uttered a joyful cry, for I felt sure that my brother had returned home. Almost at the same moment a singular desire took possession of me. I wished to see him, to speak to him, to tell him of my foolish fears, and to beg of him to chide me for them. It seemed to me I could already hear him ask me if I had forgotten that I had the blood of the Mensignacs in my veins; he always laughed in that way at my childish fears. I thought, too, for a moment, of awaking Miss Georgina, but I reflected that it would be wrong to disturb her, and so, throwing a cloak over my shoulders, I went out of my room. I recollect that just then I heard three o'clock strike. I remember that I ran rapidly along the passage carrying a lamp in my hand and keeping my eyes fixed on the lighted windows of the library. I had just passed Roger's room when my lamp suddenly went out—it was my own fault in hurrying so—however, I was left in profound darkness."

"In the name of heaven, what did you see then?" asked Edmond, who was almost as much agitated as Jeanne.

"Nothing, nothing, Edmond; at least nothing real," replied the young girl, after a moment's silence. "I only heard a strange noise which came from the left wing of the house, and chilled the blood in my veins. It was a deep and dull sound, resembling the distant rumble of a heavy vehicle, and almost at the same moment the light in the library disappeared. I was alone in darkness and with silence all around me, and I was seized with mortal terror, feeling as if I were going to die; however, recovering a little strength, I dragged myself back to my room, where I very nearly lost consciousness. But a feeling stronger than fear revived me, and drew



me to the window. The moon, shining at intervals between the clouds, lighted up the court-yard, and I then distinctly saw a man emerge from the staircase of the left wing of the house, glide along the wall, cross the grass-plot, and make for the little garden-gate. He opened it and rapidly disappeared, but I had time to recognise him, and felt quite reassured, for it was Toby."

"Toby!" cried Sartilly, starting with surprise. "That is impossible. He drove me to the opera ball at one o'clock, and at five, when we started for the Bois de Boulogne, he was still in charge of my carriage in the Rue Lepelletier."

Jeanne shook her head, as if wishing to express that all had been strange on that mournful night. "This morning," she resumed, "I sent to inquire for Roger, who was not in the house, although the porter had certainly heard him come in by the little garden gate shortly after two o'clock, and he thought he had heard him go out by the same way between three and four o'clock—at least some one had opened the gate. My fears again took possession of me, and when the notary came at ten o'clock, and Roger, whose punctuality you well know, was not here to meet him, I felt that some misfortune had happened, and I sent immediately for you. While waiting, I thought a score of times that I should go crazy."

While Edmond was listening to this account, his face brightened, and when the young girl had finished, he had recovered his usual calmness. "But, my dear Jeanne," he said to her, "you are alarming yourself unnecessarily. You know very well that Roger absents himself sometimes for weeks, and even for months."

"Never without informing me of it."

"But there was nothing unusual in his coming and going out by the private gate, for I have heard Roger say twenty times that he always came in and went out that way at night, so that he might not disturb any one."

"I have not yet told you all," murmured the young girl, in so low a voice that Edmond could scarcely hear her.

"Jeanne, if you love me, why conceal anything from me?" said the viscount, gently.

"I will tell you all," began the young girl again. "When my father died I was four years old. It was on a winter's night, and I was in bed in a room next to the one in which he was dying. All the servants of the house were collected around him, and I was alone in my crib, when a strange form suddenly passed before me. It was a woman wearing a long red dress, with her loosened hair streaming over her shoulders; she crossed the room, and it seemed to me that I lost sight of her in the hangings. A few moments later I heard sobs—Roger's sobs. Our father was dead!"

Sartilly looked at Jeanne anxiously; he again feared that her reason was wavering.

"Well," continued the young girl, in a trembling voice, "that woman—I saw her again last night! You see, now, that some member of our family must be dead."

Fear is contagious, particularly the fear caused by supernatural events, and the viscount could not help shuddering as he listened to the young girl. Besides, in all probability there was something real about this fantastic apparition, something that might throw a gloomy light upon the frightful affair of the Bois de Boulogne; that severed head, the presentment of which pursued Sartilly like a bloody nightmare, might indeed have

belonged to the woman dressed in red, who had wandered about the Mennignac mansion that night.

In spite of himself, Edmond turned round to look for the golden tress that he had thrown on to the library floor; but he could not see it, as only a wan dull light now passed through the windows, and the high oak book-cases cast shadows around. Still it seemed to him that a wavering figure was passing along at the end of the gallery, and that the pale head with the golden hair was looking at him. However, Jeanne's voice soon recalled the viscount to himself. "I saw her," repeated the young girl. "She passed quite near me—so near that the long folds of her red dress brushed against me. She walked on noiselessly, as phantoms always walk, and disappeared suddenly at a corner of the gallery."

"Could you distinguish her features?" said Sartilly.

"No; my lamp had gone out, and the moon gave but very little light; still I saw that she was pale, and her hair was streaming in long tresses on her shoulders."

These last words recalled Edmond to a sense of the truth. Undoubtedly some strange and tragical events had taken place in the house that night.

"Listen to me, my dear Jeanne," he said, again taking the girl's hands in his own. "I cannot believe in visions, but there is a mystery in all this which must be promptly cleared up, and until Roger's return you must give me your entire confidence."

"You know, Edmond, that I have no other friend but you in the world."

"Then I beg of you always to speak to me as if I were your brother."

"I have nothing to conceal," said the young girl, in a frank and cordial manner.

"This woman whom you saw, did she not awaken any other recollection than that of your father's death?"

"It is true," replied Jeanne, thoughtfully, "that it occurred to me that her form, her step, and her long waving hair were familiar—I was reminded of a person whom I had seen several times previously, but it may have been in my dreams."

"Was it at a ball? or at the theatre? or in the Champs Elysées?"

"You forget, Edmond, that I have never yet gone into society, and that last week Roger took me for the first time to the Italian opera."

"But you might have seen her in a carriage in the Bois de Boulogne?"

"No, no," repeated Jeanne, hesitatingly; "no, it was not she; and yet, when I was quite a child, Roger and I were driving together one beautiful spring day in the Bois, when he bowed to a woman whose marvellous loveliness struck me, and a vague recollection of her came back to me last night when the vision passed by."

"And you have not met this woman since your childhood, or for several years, at all events?"

"No; if I had seen her again, I could never have forgotten her."

"You are quite sure that you have not seen her this winter, in a superb carriage, drawn by four horses?"

"I have been out very little since last autumn. Roger often went out on horseback, so I only had Miss Georgina left to accompany me, and she feared the cold so much that I gave up my drives in an open carriage."

A pause followed upon this reply. Edmond had anxiously been looking forward to a ray of light, but now all seemed dark again.

"Are you sure that you saw this same woman on the night of your father's death?" he finally asked.

"I am sure of it."

"And the unknown person whom you saw in your childhood, in an open carriage, did not remind you of the first apparition?"

"I cannot say," answered Jeanne. "Both recollections returned to me at the same time last night—the first very clear, the other more vague, but never before had they been presented to my mind at one and the same time. Besides, I remember now that on the day after my father's death, I told Miss Georgina of what I had seen, and she reproved me severely, and forbade me ever repeating so foolish a story."

"It is very strange," murmured Sartilly.

"Ah, since you also despair, Roger must, indeed, be dead," cried Jeanne, sobbing.

The sight of the poor girl's grief restored all the viscount's energy. He could not at such a moment allow her to be depressed, and whatever might be the solution of this dark enigma, he must unravel it quickly, if he wished to save the girl he adored from despair.

"Jeanne," said he, in a firm voice, "if you will help me, I swear to you that you shall find your brother again."

"What must I do?"

"You must let me act, and give me all the information you can. Do your servants know of what happened last night?"

"They know that their master did not return this morning, for I sent them to look for him, but they no doubt think that I am annoyed in consequence of Roger not keeping his engagement with the notary."

"I will see the notary to-day, but above all, dear Jeanne, try to hide your anxiety. Have you spoken to Miss Georgina about it?"

"Yes; but she laughed at my fears, and, as I have already told you, she does not believe in apparitions."

Sartilly reflected in silence, absorbed in thoughts which he did not wish to express, and which the young girl tried to read on his face. Suddenly, however, he gave vent to a remark: "It is really impossible; Toby could not have come here last night."

Jeanne was about to reply by reiterating her statement when a footman drew aside the door hangings, and announced that the marquis's notary begged Mademoiselle de Mensignac to receive him on a very urgent matter.

Edmond and the young girl both started to their feet, as if struck by the same electric shock. A vague presentiment warned them that this visit would clear up a part of the formidable mystery. "Stay with me, Edmond," said Jeanne to the viscount, after telling the servant to show in the notary.

An instant later, M. Calmet came in. He was a middle-aged man, whose countenance expressed integrity and intelligence, and he came forward with an ease of manner natural to a notary patronised by the greatest families of the noble faubourg. As he bowed respectfully to Mademoiselle de Mensignac, an observer might certainly have remarked on his face a shade of serious sadness, which foreboded bad tidings, just as clouds betoken a storm.

"I beg of you to excuse my pressing to see you, mademoiselle, but I had an appointment of the greatest importance with your brother this morning. I have not been able to find him, and as the business I expected to transact with him is very urgent, I thought it better to inform you of it, and——"

On reaching this point in his discourse, the notary stopped short and looked at Edmond,

"The Viscount de Sartilly, my betrothed," said Jeanne.

"I am Roger de Mensignac's most intimate friend," added Edmond.

"Then Monsieur le Vicomte," replied M. Calmet, "you will certainly understand my anxiety and insistence. The marquis, with whose punctuality I have been well acquainted for the last fifteen years, is not to be found on the very day when he was to hand me the amount of a bond signed by him in my office to the order of one of my clients, who lent him a large sum of money last year, and I really do not know how to account for his inexplicable absence."

"I did not know that Roger ever had any need to borrow money," said Sartilly, rather coldly; "but whatever the sum may be, it is quite useless to annoy Mademoiselle de Mensignac about it. If you will tell me what the amount is, I am quite ready to pay it for the marquis; as I have already told you, Roger is my best friend."

"The payment due to-day, 13th February, 1847, is five hundred thousand francs," M. Calmet gravely said.

There are amounts the very enormity of which astonishes minds the least disposed to admit the power of money, and in those days five hundred thousand francs formed a sum that the wealthiest persons rarely if ever paid or received at one time. Sartilly in his astonishment tried to think what could have been the motive of this colossal loan contracted by his friend, and could not assign any reason for it. Roger had never said a word in his presence calculated to create a belief that he was in pecuniary embarrassment, and without knowing all the events of his friend's life, Edmond was sure that he had never been carried away by a passion for gambling, such as often shatters the largest fortunes. The marquis had only patronised the card table now and then, just for the sake of pastime. Moreover, he had never had any dealings with the women who make it their business to ruin gilded youths; and so, on hearing the notary speak of half a million of francs, the viscount remained silent, with bewilderment plainly written upon his features.

M. Calmet's countenance expressed sincere interest in his absent client, as well as in the noble young girl to whom he had just communicated this sad news. At the same time, it was evident that he believed the marquis's absence to be premeditated. This opinion, carefully hidden as it was, had not escaped Edmond, who felt as much hurt as if a slur had been cast upon himself.

"Excuse me, sir," he said rather haughtily; "but was Monsieur de Mensignac aware upon what precise day this debt fell due?—a debt so enormous that it surprises me extremely."

"I don't recollect whether I told you, Monsieur le Vicomte, that the marquis sent for me yesterday, to speak to me about this very payment, and he left me after making an appointment for this morning at ten o'clock, telling me to prepare a receipt in advance. I was to hand the funds to my client to-day, and I have not informed him as yet of Monsieur de Mensignac's absence."

"Then, sir," said Sartilly, quickly, "as Roger spoke to you about this affair, he must have consulted you as to the securities he would have had to sell to meet this payment. Are you not his agent in such matters?"

"I have been notary to the family for more than twenty years," answered M. Calmet, quietly; "but the marquis, a short time after the death of his father, the general, sold all his landed property, and no doubt invested the proceeds. At all events, since then I have had

nothing to do with the management of his fortune. This house and the grounds around it belong to Mademoiselle de Mensignac, as representing her share in her father's fortune."

Although Sartilly ought to have anticipated this overwhelming reply, he experienced as he heard it the alarm of a man who sees a precipice yawning at his feet. The honour of his dearest friend seemed to be in danger. The Mensignac name, nobly borne by those he loved, seemed to be overclouded by a gloomy catastrophe. The unhappy viscount held down his head, and his wandering eyes seemed trying to fathom the depths of an invisible abyss.

As for Jeanne, she scarcely understood that the ruin of her brother was in question, for the frightful vision of the night was always before her eyes, and three words unceasingly returned to her lips: "Roger is dead!"

The deep despair of the young girl, who, by the disappearance of her brother, had become an orphan a second time, reminded Edmond de Sartilly that she would henceforth be under his care since she had no other friend. "Sir," he said to the notary in a calm voice, "Mademoiselle de Mensignac is absolutely ignorant of money matters, so I think we can spare her the pain of listening to details."

The notary assented.

"Merely in my capacity as Roger's friend," continued Sartilly, "I trust his sister will permit me to take his place under these sad circumstances. Will you, Jeanne?" he added with a look of loving entreaty.

The young girl rose, pressed his hand, bowed to M. Calmet, and left the room without speaking. She had divined that Edmond wished to devote himself to her, and she loved him sufficiently to accept his devotion.

"Now that we are alone," said the viscount, with feverish vivacity, "we can speak freely. My fortune is more than sufficient to pay Roger's debt, and I am ready to pay it for him."

"This offer does you honour, sir," said the notary, in a feeling voice, "and I am very happy, indeed, that the Mensignac name will not be dishonoured."

"I am only doing my duty, as the young girl who just left this room is to be my wife. Will you tell me as briefly as possible what arrangements I must make to settle this affair?"

M. Calmet's face expressed painful surprise, and he stammered out some unintelligible words. The viscount did not at first remark his embarrassment, for without waiting for his answer he asked him yet another question: "You, sir, who know Roger's habits, at least in pecuniary affairs, can perhaps explain why he borrowed so large an amount at so short a term of payment?"

"I have never been able to account for it," answered the notary, sadly. "Once before, about six years ago, the marquis borrowed from one of my clients almost as large a sum—four hundred thousand francs—and it was punctually paid back at the end of the year. Moreover, the lender was the same person as now, and would not have consented to wait."

"And did not Roger ever speak to you of what he did with this money?"

"Never, Monsieur le Vicomte, and I remember that when once I ventured to risk an observation on this subject he refused to enter into explanations. However," added the notary, timidly, "you have done me the honour of asking me what arrangements could be made."

"Yes," interrupted Edmond; "of course you will understand that I have not this sum immediately at my disposal, and I should like——"

"Alas!" replied Monsieur Calmet, in a tone of sincere regret, "your generosity will, unfortunately, be useless."

"What do you mean?"

"The lender insists upon being paid to-day; he has even forbidden me to allow any delay, or to accept any security. If the money is not paid by this evening, an action at law will at once be started."

"That is impossible," cried Sartilly; "a loan of this kind is not a bill of exchange."

"There is something hidden in this affair," said M. Calmet, "some secret that escapes my penetration, and I fear that this unusual rigour conceals (dare I say it?) some scheme of vengeance."

"Perhaps so," said the viscount, thoughtfully; "but who is the lender, pray?"

"A rich foreigner who only resides in Paris occasionally, and who has only been back here for a month or so."

"What is his name?"

"He is called Monsieur de Noreff, and he lives in a magnificent mansion at the corner of the Rue de Varennes."

"Ah! so it is he?" cried Sartilly, darting like a maniac to the other end of the library; "that proof—it must be here and I must have it!" and thereupon stooping down suddenly, he picked up something that the notary could not see, and rushed out of the house into the courtyard.

A footman was walking his horse up and down. He leapt into the saddle, and, the gate being open, he spurred on Ralph, who reared at first but finally galloped at full speed down the almost precipitous declivity of the Trocadéro. On reaching the Quai de Billy skirting the Seine, Sartilly gave his steed full rein, and, bending over his neck, began a mad race. The few passers-by turned round in astonishment at seeing a young and elegantly dressed man thus risking his life by galloping over the slippery paving stones at so furious a pace.

In less than a quarter of an hour Sartilly reached the Place de la Concorde, which he quickly crossed, continuing his route by way of the quay of the Tuileries. Ralph, with bloody flanks and covered with sweat, nearly fell when he reached the Louvre, but Edmond kept him up with admirable skill, and urged him on, at the same mad pace, to the Pont Neuf. There he turned abruptly to the right, ascended the then steep incline of the bridge, and, when in front of the bronze statue of King Henri IV, swept like a whirlwind into the Place Dauphine, where he reined up just outside the Prefecture of Police. Careless as to what became of Ralph, who could not have gone another fifty yards, the viscount sprang lightly to the ground, and was about to cross the formidable threshold when a guard at the entrance asked him where he was going.

"I want to speak to the prefect of police," said Sartilly, roughly.

"Persons are not admitted to see the prefect of police unless they are duly summoned," said the guard, rather surprised by Sartilly's manner. "Have you a letter of admission?"

"No; but so serious an affair is in question that those who stop me will be responsible for the delay."

Certain tones and manners rarely fail to produce an effect, and there was so much authority in the viscount's voice and gestures, that the sentry

quickly softened, and calling a comrade told him to conduct Sartilly to the prefect's office.

Whilst following the crooked and gloomy passages of the old edifice, Edmond reflected as to the step he was about to take. A strange thought had suddenly sprung up in his brain, over-excited by fever; he was about to denounce Monsieur de Noreff, who, he believed, had murdered both his wife and Roger de Mensignac. When the notary had mentioned the foreigner's name, Edmond had hastily picked up the golden tress, intending to take it to the authorities without delay. But it now occurred to him that his friend, who had disappeared during the night of the crime, might be suspected of being an accomplice in this murder, committed in his—the Mensignac—mansion. Yes; might not the police accuse Roger of the crime? All the same, Sartilly felt anxious to speak, anxious to revenge himself upon the murderer of his bosom friend, the brother of his dear Jeanne, for he felt sure that Roger had fallen into some terrible snare, as a Mensignac was incapable of such an infamous act as murder. Thus his hesitation was of short duration, and he resolved to speak of the disappearance of the marquis, to declare that the severed head was that of Madame de Noreff, and even to mention the money lent by the latter's husband to Roger. The points which he meant to keep back were those which seemed to indicate that the crime had taken place in the Mensignac mansion.

The viscount and his escort having reached the door of the prefect's office, the guard went in to present Sartilly's card, returning almost immediately, however, with a message that the prefect was not at liberty, and therefore requested the viscount to see the chief of the detective police.

It mattered little to Sartilly which functionary conducted the inquiry, provided it was energetically and promptly taken in hand: so he immediately repaired to the office of the detective service, on the ground floor of the prefecture. On his name being announced he was at once admitted, and on entering the office, he recognised the commissary of Saint Cloud, who had just been dictating a long account of the Bois de Boulogne affair for the benefit of the chief of the detective service.

"I was just going to write to ask you to come here," said the chief, politely; "and I am going to send for Baron Polard and Monsieur Versoix also. We cannot have too many honourable witnesses," he added, courteously, "for this affair has begun badly; the murderer has so far escaped, and I fear that it will be very difficult to find him."

"I have brought you his name," rejoined the viscount, quietly.

"Permit me, sir, to thank you," said the chief, scarcely restraining a smile of incredulity; "yours is a most precious discovery, as the identity of the victim is not yet proved."

"The victim," replied Sartilly, in a firm voice, "has been murdered by her husband, whose name is De Noreff, and who resides at No. 133 Rue de Varennes."

"Noreff," replied the chief, who had become quite serious on remarking the clearness of the viscount's statement. "Noreff? Isn't he a very wealthy foreigner who travels a great deal?"

"The same; and his wife's head will be recognised by all the frequenters of the Champs Elysées."

"We must have some information about him in our papers," resumed the chief ringing a bell, and giving a note to his secretary. Then turning

to Sartilly, he added : " Will you now be kind enough to tell me briefly on what you found so serious an accusation ? "

" This man also murdered my friend, the Marquis Roger de Mensignac, who disappeared last night, and he did so because Monsieur de Mensignac was his wife's lover. "

The chief of the detective service looked attentively at the viscount, and was absorbed in reflection, when his secretary came back again, bringing a sheet of paper covered with fine close handwriting. " Ah ! these notes are not very favourable, " said the functionary in a low voice. " There is a possible connection, I see, with what you tell me. The name of Mensignac occurs here, at the date of 1834. "

A moment's silence ensued. " Well, sir, " suddenly asked the chief, " are you willing to swear in a court of justice to all that you have just declared to me ? "

" I am willing. "

" Very well. Jottrat, have a cab ready outside in five minutes' time, for this gentleman and me. You must get into another one with three agents of the secret brigade, and follow us at the distance of fifty paces. "

The secretary was about to execute these orders, when the chief added : " See that these men are strong and courageous, and let each of them have a couple of pistols for use in case of need. You, my dear sir, " he continued, addressing the commissary of Saint Cloud, " must be kind enough to wait for me here. I shall return in a couple of hours at the latest, and I shall then need your assistance. " Finally, bowing politely to the viscount, he added : " If you will do me the favour to accompany me, I am quite ready to start. "

" In what way can my presence be of any use to you ? " asked Sartilly, coldly.

" It is indispensable to prove the identity of a man whom neither I nor my agents know. "

" And where are we going, if you please ? "

" We are going to No. 133 Rue de Varennes, to arrest Monsieur Christian Waldemar de Noreff, a Swedish subject, who is strongly suspected of being a diplomatic spy in the pay of Russia, and whom you accuse of having murdered his wife. "

### III.

#### IS IT SHE ?

WHILE the cab rolled on towards the Boulevard des Invalides, Sartilly had ample time to reflect upon the singular events which, from the opera ball, had brought him into the society of the chief of the detective police.

There were two distinct elements in the viscount's nature. Although, as a rule, well endowed with reasoning powers and dispassionate calmness, like all people of northern origin ; he was, when carried away by passion, a man to yield to his first impulse. Certainly his training and the life he had led were not calculated to foster thoughtlessness ; but, despite a somewhat adventurous career—adventurous so far as the fair sex were concerned—his heart had remained as sensitive as that of a young fellow just reaching manhood. His love for Jeanne de Mensignac was the more



sincere and pure, as he had indulged in all the artificial enjoyment which Parisian life can offer to a young and wealthy man of leisure, and for the last two years this new feeling had gradually taken complete possession of him. The gay young blood who had gone to the Mensignac mansion mainly to recount his follies to Roger, had yielded insensibly to Jeanne's influence. The child, whom he had scarcely noticed, had become a beautiful young girl; and the viscount had not even tried to resist the undefinable charm she exercised over him. His life became changed, and his dreams of happiness were now summed up in a marriage with Jeanne, a marriage which everything had seemed to favour until that fatal night.

As soon as he had thought he could see a ray of light amid the gloom, he had started off to save Jeanne's brother, or, if too late, to revenge his death, without considering if he were taking the course most likely to ensure success. However, his visit to the prefecture had already calmed him. The formalities which precede an arrest, the police officials with whom he was not in the habit of associating, the unpleasantness of acting as an informer—a part which an honourable man never accepts without repugnance—all combined to make Sartilly feel uncomfortable; and he began to realise, too late, that he had placed himself in a false position. Although he felt a great antipathy for the man he was accusing, he really knew very little about him, and now that he was obliged to take upon himself such serious responsibility, the suspicious circumstances on which he had founded his accusation seemed much less conclusive. He could not forget that Roger de Mensignac had always carefully concealed his money transactions from him, and the large sum which Monsieur de Noreff had lent the marquis might perhaps be quite simply explained. How could he know either whether Roger's disappearance was not caused by his desire to hide some family misfortune, of a nature to compromise Jeanne's name and honour?

Thus, while the cab drove slowly along the quay, the viscount, although apparently calm, suffered a thousand mental tortures. His companion seemed perfectly at his ease, discharging his terrible functions with the indifference which habit imparts, and a passer-by, noting his quiet air and easy glance, would never have dreamed that this placid person was going to arrest a man accused of a capital crime. However, while the chief was apparently looking at the street in an indifferent manner, he was stealthily observing Sartilly, and he had certainly sufficient discernment to divine the young fellow's agitation. Perhaps he thought he had found out the motive of it, for, after a rather long spell of silence, he started a conversation, by asking a question which annoyed the viscount extremely. "Pray, sir," he said, in the most polite manner, "do you know Monsieur de Noreff well?"

The question touched Sartilly so closely that he could not avoid showing all the embarrassment he felt. "I know him," he said, hesitatingly, "as all Paris knows him, by seeing him in the Bois and at the opera; I am not personally acquainted with him, however."

"And does he know you?" persisted the officer.

"Perhaps he does, but I don't think so," answered the viscount, coldly.

He felt galled by these repeated questions, and already regretted having voluntarily exposed himself to them. His clouded countenance did not escape the eyes of his shrewd questioner, who doubtless thought it best to explain himself, for he quietly continued: "My only desire,

sir, is to obtain proper information so that I may be able to act promptly and safely. If you had been acquainted with Monsieur de Noreff, my plan would not have been the same; but I beg of you to believe that I have full confidence in your statements, and that I shall not hesitate to do my duty."

Sartilly bowed coldly.

"Excuse me, if I insist on the subject," said the chief, in the same quiet manner, "but I wish to explain to you that I did not decide without good reasons to follow up your revelation. There are notes in our papers which make the accusation you have brought against Noreff quite probable, and in cases of this kind my principle is never to lose a moment. There will be time enough later on to compare the information I previously possessed with that with which you have furnished me, but for the moment the most important thing is to act; and besides," added the chief, with a contented smile, "I shall learn more by an hour's conversation with this Swede than by listening to all the witnesses in the affair."

"I think as you do," said the viscount, struck by these simple and sensible remarks; "and I have only to ask you to point out what I am to do."

"Nothing can be more simple; we will go to the house together, and if necessary I will use your name to secure an interview with Monsieur de Noreff. If by any chance another person should receive us in his place, you will make a sign to me; on the contrary, however, if it is really Noreff whom we see, I will attend to the rest."

Then as Sartilly showed some surprise at this idea of another person being substituted for the real Noreff, his companion laughingly added:

"The precaution seems to you puerile, but I know by experience that it is of some importance, and my calling makes me mistrustful."

The cab was at this moment passing the corner of the Esplanade des Invalides, and the chief looked out of the window, to assure himself that the other vehicle was following him at a suitable distance.

"In that cab which is behind us, sir, I have a valuable agent," he continued, in the easy tone of a man who sees that the execution of a difficult enterprise is progressing according to his wishes. "I told him to follow us at a distance of fifty yards, and he has had the wit to mount on the driver's box to regulate the pace. I am sure that he will keep the right distance in the rear, and will arrive exactly two minutes after us."

"Do you intend to take him into the house with us?" asked the viscount, absently.

The functionary could not repress a smile. "That would be both useless and dangerous," said he, emphasising the words, "for we must surprise Noreff, and if we were to present ourselves escorted by a brigade of detectives, our affair would probably fall through."

"I thought we were going to arrest him?"

"The first thing to be done is to question him skilfully without letting him suspect the object of our visit. I want to get hold of a certainty, and I cannot secure one unless I talk with him. But don't be uneasy; every precaution is taken in case he should think of escaping. You heard the instructions I gave at the prefecture to Jottrat—a word or two, not more. Well, I am sure that the house will be surrounded and watched by my four men better than by a battalion of infantry, and if I have any need of them I shall not be obliged to call them twice. Ah! Jottrat is of the old school; he began his career under Fouché, and he has kept up his old habits."

The viscount listened rather disdainfully, for this praise of an unknown

detective interested him very little. He was thinking of the scene he was about to be an actor in, and was looking carelessly at the long, deserted boulevard along which the cab was now passing. The high walls of the garden of Monsieur de Noreff's mansion appeared on the left, extending as far as the corner of the Rue de Varennes.

The decisive moment was now approaching, and Sartilly was becoming more and more anxious; while his companion examined the approaches of the house with sure, quick eyes. A few carts were coming along in the middle of the street, and on the footway to the left only one pedestrian could be seen hurrying past. He was shabbily dressed, horribly muddy, and absolutely unworthy of notice to any one else than a policeman. As it was, the chief remarked him, and watched him so persistently, that at last the viscount's attention was attracted. Sartilly's eyes were turned in the same direction, and he experienced a strange impression, for it seemed to him that he had seen a man of that figure, similarly attired, before, but he could not recall under what circumstances. He was busy trying to remember when the fellow suddenly turned into the Rue de Varennes, disappearing round the corner of the wall. Rapidly as he had walked, his profile had been visible for a moment, and, transient as was the viscount's glance, it proved sufficient to revive his memory.

"It is he!" cried Sartilly, half rising from his scat, as if he wished to jump out on to the boulevard.

"Who is it?" asked the chief, quietly.

"Why, the man who had the basket, the accomplice of this fellow Noreff; and at this moment he is evidently going to the Swede's house; he must be arrested first, and I will——"

"On the contrary, we must let him alone, as he will furnish us with another proof. If he goes into Noreff's house, it will be easier to arrest him there than to run after him in the street, at the risk of spoiling the whole affair."

Sartilly realised the justice of this reply, and yet he could scarcely restrain his impatience, feeling a presentiment that the murderer would again escape them, and cursing the miserable hired horse which crept so slowly over the muddy pavement. When they at last turned the corner of the aristocratic Rue de Varennes, the viscount could not suppress a cry of rage. The street was quite deserted as far as the eye could reach, and there was no one standing before the entrance of Monsieur de Noreff's mansion; it was quite impossible that the gate could have been opened and shut again in so short a space of time, and yet the mysterious stranger was no longer visible.

When the cab stopped before the house, Sartilly darted a despairing glance at his companion, who, still calm and smiling, pointed with his finger to a low narrow door in the high grey wall, some twenty paces off.

"Now we can go in," said the chief of the detective service, "the birds are in their nests."

At the same moment as he rang the bell at the grand gateway, a vehicle could be heard drawing up on the Boulevard des Invalides, near by.

"Those are our men," whispered the chief; "before we are let in, they will already be waiting and watching."

"And if the house has two outlets?" asked Sartilly.

"There are two, and it is on them that I rely in case of resistance. Jottrat will enter by way of the garden; he has previously watched here under other circumstances, and knows the entrance."

While these remarks were being exchanged in a low voice, the gate was opened, and a colossal porter with an imposing face could be seen just inside the court-yard.

"Will you hand this to your master?" the chief of the detective police said curtly, at the same time handing the flunkey a card of a peculiar shape.

The porter, who had been eyeing the visitors from head to foot with a rather disdainful air, suddenly changed his manner, and at once conducted them to a flight of steps, where two gorgeous footmen met them, and led them into an elegant waiting-room.

The court-yard they had just crossed was shaded by large trees, and it communicated with a spacious garden, in which a glimpse could be had of some wide, straight walks, and thick hedges cut in the old-fashioned style. The house had been built in Louis XV's reign, and must have been recently restored. One could easily see the changes that modern taste had effected in the old pile; and if it had gained in comfort, it had certainly lost much of its imposing appearance. It was still, however, a princely abode, and all the surroundings betokened that the occupants lived in high style.

Sartilly, surprised at the cool and easy manner in which his companion had effected an entrance, had for a moment forgotten his thirst for vengeance, so keenly was his curiosity excited. He wondered what means the bold police-officer intended to employ to attain his ends, and he could not arrive at any reasonable conclusion. While waiting to be ushered into Noreff's presence, he would have liked to question the chief, but the latter's eyes recommended him to keep silent, for walls might have ears, and the greatest prudence was advisable. The viscount's reflections were at last interrupted by the entrance of a servant, dressed in black, with silk stockings, and a gold chain round his neck. This dignified personage asked the visitors to follow him, and led them through a long gallery, adorned with flowers, to the entrance of a conservatory, or rather a wonderful winter garden. A man was strolling there amid a real forest of rare plants, and his semi-oriental costume stood out in dazzling colours against the dark green exotic shrubs. On hearing the sound of the visitors' steps, he turned and showed his face, and a ray of sunshine falling at that moment athwart the glass windows, lit up his whole person from head to foot. He was a man to whom it would have been difficult to assign any particular age, for although his hair and whiskers were white, his complexion was dark and swarthy, and if he had numerous deep wrinkles on his forehead, his eyes had retained the brilliancy and vivacity of youth, while his powerful form bespoke unusual strength and vigour.

It required but a second for Edmond to recognise him as the habitual companion of the beautiful woman with the golden hair; he was the mysterious foreigner, Monsieur de Noreff. If Sartilly had merely seen his teeth, white as ivory, glistening between his red lips, he would have known him, and he did not hesitate to nod affirmatively as the chief gave him a questioning glance.

Monsieur de Noreff, stopping short in his walk, examined his two visitors in rather an unfriendly manner. The viscount felt uncomfortable under his clear penetrating scrutiny, and he longed for his companion to break the embarrassing silence; however, the chief calmly surveyed Monsieur de Noreff, and seemed to be waiting to be questioned.

"Is it you who have just arrived from Moscow?" at last said the

enigmatical personage, in a voice which made Edmond start, for it seemed to him that he had heard that sarcastic tone and harsh accent before.

"Yes, I have just arrived from Moscow by the way of Vienna," calmly replied the bold chief of the detective service.

"And who is the man with you?" asked Monsieur de Noreff, pointing to the viscount, who could scarcely contain his indignation on hearing the foreigner speak so insolently.

"A brother, who will start to-morrow, taking my report to Russia. We can speak in his presence."

"Very well, what have you to tell me?"

"I have come in the name of the committee," said the chief, with calculated slowness, "to ask you for some explanation of the constant intercourse you keep up with a Frenchman, who does not belong to us, and who is named the Marquis de Mensignac."

Monsieur de Noreff started on hearing this name spoken so unexpectedly, and although he recovered himself right speedily, he was not quick enough to hide his passing embarrassment from the searching eyes of the chief. The Swede's face now assumed a singular expression—surprise, anger, disdain, and uneasiness might be read upon it at the same time.

"My intercourse with the Marquis de Mensignac only concerns myself, and my affairs with him have been carried on with funds which belong to me personally," he said.

"The committee wish to know what these affairs are."

"I do not recognise their right to ask me that question," answered Monsieur de Noreff, angrily. And then almost immediately recovering his calmness, he resumed: "I do not recognise the right of any one to inquire into the acts of my private life; but as I have no reason to hide them, I am willing to answer you. I have several times lent important sums of money to the Marquis de Mensignac, and this very day he is to pay me back half a million of francs."

"And you have not yet received the amount?" said the chief, without showing the least sign of astonishment, on learning this serious circumstance, with which Sartilly had not had an opportunity to acquaint him.

"No; I am even afraid that I shall never receive it, and that I shall lose my money entirely," said Monsieur de Noreff, dryly. "These explanations will suffice, I hope; at all events, I have nothing more to tell you."

His look and gesture indicated so clearly his intention of dismissing his visitors, that the viscount thought, for an instant, that the game was lost; but on glancing at his companion he immediately felt reassured, for while Monsieur de Noreff was speaking in this haughty manner the chief had, so to speak, become transfigured—his features had lost their icy expression and assumed a look of aggressive irony, his eyes now shone with sly humour, and it was in a jeering voice, and with affected politeness, that he said: "I beg your pardon, sir; but to my great regret, I do not think that we understand each other at all."

Monsieur de Noreff looked at the chief of the detective service with astonishment.

"The explanations that you have just had the kindness to give me are far from sufficient," replied the chief, in the same calm manner, "for I have learned very little, so far, with regard to the Marquis de Mensignac, and I have come here solely to talk to you about him."

"You say that you have come here merely to speak of the Marquis de

Mensignac?" asked De Noreff, pale with rage; "but a moment ago you had just arrived from Moscow. This is either treachery or an infamous joke. Who are you?" he cried, approaching the chief in a furious manner.

"I am going to tell you; but the first thing I wish you to know is that you will not receive your money to-day, as the Marquis de Mensignac was murdered last night, and I even believe that I know his murderer."

A flash of fury darted from Monsieur de Noreff's eyes, and he moved forward as if to spring upon the man who had thus spoken to him; however, by a prodigious effort of will, he managed to master his anger. "I begin to guess the truth," he said, with contemptuous coldness; "you are simply a spy—only a scamp of that kind would be capable of prying into the secrets of a political association, and then abusing them in order to carry on his vile practices."

"I am the chief of the French detective police, and I do not think, sir, that the functions I discharge are held by you in any great horror. It is true, however, that my association is not a political one."

These words, spoken in a scoffing tone, exasperated De Noreff still more, and he retorted: "Let us put an end to all this, and rid me of your odious presence. What do you want with me?"

"I want you to come with me to the Prefecture of Police, where you will be able to explain yourself at your ease."

"In other words, you are going to arrest me?"

The chief of the detective police bowed affirmatively.

"And you thought," replied De Noreff clenching his hands, "that I would let you arrest me without crushing you both—you thought you would leave this house alive?"

"I think so still," said the chief coldly. "For the last hour my men have surrounded your residence, and I have only to summon them with this whistle; but I hope you will not oblige me to use violence."

There was a long silence, during which Monsieur de Noreff partially succeeded in recovering his composure. "I might consent to go with you," he finally said, "if it were only to make you pay more dearly for your insolent mistake; but I first want to know on what pretext you presume to arrest me."

"The Marquis de Mensignac disappeared last night, and your meetings with him have been too frequent not to make you suspected."

"He has disappeared, and so it is I who have murdered him? Who is the originator of this absurd accusation?"

"I am," said Edmond, looking Monsieur de Noreff full in the face. "I am the Viscount de Sartilly, and the friend of the man you have cowardly killed."

"Indeed," said De Noreff, shrugging his shoulders, "this would really be amusing, if it were not so shameful. If your friend was murdered last night, it was not by me, for I have not left my house for three days."

"We saw your accomplice enter the house by the little green door in the Rue de Varennes," said the chief of the detective police quietly, and he thought he detected a contraction of Noreff's features, almost immediately concealed.

"I suppose that is not all," the Swede said sneeringly; "and that I still have other crimes on my conscience?"

"Yes, that is not all."

"And of what else am I still accused?"

"Of having murdered a woman."

"Really, and what woman?"

"The one who has accompanied you about everywhere since your return to France, the woman whose beauty all Paris has remarked, who bears your name, and whom you only married, perhaps, to make her an accomplice in your intrigues."

A loud peal of laughter interrupted the official. Monsieur de Noreff gave way to a sudden burst of gaiety, and after ringing the bell, threw himself on a divan, still laughing.

"Tell Madame de Noreff that I wish her to come down here," he said, to the footman who answered the bell.

It would be difficult to describe the effect that this unexpected phrase produced. Sartilly's features expressed utter astonishment, and holding down his head to avoid meeting the triumphant glance of Monsieur de Noreff, he flushed and turned pale alternately. The painful thought that he might have made a mistake suddenly sprang up in his mind for the first time, and the weighty consequences of an error of this description quickly appeared to him. In what frightful embarrassment he would be placed, if the dead woman whose head had been found was not Madame de Noreff? What could he say to this foreigner, undeservedly accused, in palliation of his offence in applying to the police on an utterly groundless suspicion? And what would the chief think of him for having, by guilty thoughtlessness, induced the authorities to take so serious a step?

Overwhelmed by the weight of his imprudence, Sartilly did not dare to raise his eyes, and the chilling silence that followed upon the servant's departure served to increase his trouble.

He was thinking of some means of escaping from this humiliating position, and trying to invent some excuse that might soothe his wounded self-esteem, when he felt a soft nudge at his elbow; and on shaking off his stupor, and looking at the chief detective, he found him unchanged and motionless, with the same ironical smile on his lips. While observing Monsieur de Noreff, the expression of his eye said so plainly, "I do not believe in this ruse," that Sartilly in a measure recovered his composure.

De Noreff did not, however, show the least sign of uneasiness, but whistled while pulling some dead leaves off a magnificent red camellia, within reach of his hands; and from time to time he even darted a glance of contempt at his two visitors.

Steps were soon heard approaching along the gallery, and a second glance from the chief of the detective police to his companion implied: "I depend upon you to identify the person who is coming." Sartilly understood him, and began to breathe freely again. The possibility of substituting another person for the dead woman had just presented itself to his mind, and he was preparing to dispute the imposture.

"This man has divined rightly," he thought. "De Noreff knows that I have never seen his victim elsewhere than in the Champs Elysées or the Bois de Boulogne, and he hopes to pass off another person, an accomplice, perhaps, upon us. It is very audacious, but the scamp cannot deceive me," he mentally added, on seeing the door open.

However, it was a man who came in, a major-domo dressed in black, with a white tie, a carefully shaven chin, and grey whiskers cut in what is called the English fashion. This personage, whose grave demeanour sufficiently announced his importance, bowed respectfully, and said some words in a foreign language to Monsieur de Noreff.

"Speak in French, Karl," said his master, with perfect calmness; "these gentlemen want to hear what you have just told me."

"It is useless," said the chief, "I understand German."

"A very fortunate circumstance, indeed," said Monsieur de Noreff, smiling disdainfully, "as it will spare me the trouble of translating."

"There is very little merit about the matter, as I had already concluded what has just been told you—that Madame de Noreff is not at home," said the chief in an ironical manner, which he took no pains to hide.

"Madame has gone to the Bois in the blue barouche, but she will return before long, as she has an appointment with the Baroness Amstein at four o'clock," said the servant.

There was a short spell of silence, during which the chief of the detective police remained cold and impenetrable, while Monsieur de Noreff's easy attitude expressed complete satisfaction.

"Very well, Karl," he said; "you can go."

The major-domo backed out of the room, and Sartilly observed him attentively all the while. On seeing this man, he had experienced a strange impression. The uncertain faces that haunt our dreams occasionally become embodied and we try to connect the faded images of nocturnal visions with the real beings we meet in life. It was thus with the viscount. The vulgar face and insignificant figure of this servant had awakened a forgotten impression, but he had no precise recollection of having seen the fellow before. Still, he would have perhaps attached more importance to the matter if it had not been for the mental shocks he had just experienced. He now had too little faith in his first impulses to allow himself to be led away by any trick of memory, and he attributed the idea that had seized hold of him to an illusion of his disturbed brain.

The voice of his shrewd companion recalled him to himself. "It is very annoying, sir," said the chief, "that Madame de Noreff should have gone out alone to-day."

"Why, if you please?" asked Monsieur de Noreff, haughtily.

"Because, if by chance she doesn't return, I shall find it difficult to believe in her existence."

Monsieur de Noreff shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and drew out his watch. "You will surely grant me half an hour to convince you that I am right," he said coldly.

"Come, we have had enough of all this, sir," replied the chief of the detective force. "We are both of us playing a childish game, but I will explain myself. For nearly ten years I have been employed in this profession. I think I have acquired some experience in cases of the kind, and I am at least sure that I reflect maturely before acting. So, if I have decided to arrest a rich man of good position, you may be certain that the accusations which have been brought against you amount, in my eyes, to proofs. You must, at least, do me the justice to acknowledge that I have gone straight to the point, and if I did use artifice at first, it was because I was afraid of not being admitted, and wished to avoid entering your house by force. But it is time to finish all this; it is to your interest to accompany me unresistingly and without creating any scandal. Shifts and delays cannot alter the final result, and more than that, they are unworthy of your character, and," added the officer, lowering his voice, "of the functions that you fill."

These last words, no doubt, struck home, for Monsieur de Noreff, turning pale, appeared to hesitate for a moment; however, his embarrassment did



not subsist and he finally answered: "My functions have nothing in common with the foolish charge you have brought against me."

"Absolutely nothing," said the officer.

"You know that I might lay claim to the protection of a foreign embassy," continued Monsieur de Noreff, who had recovered his composure, "but I do not want to use my right, as I prefer to have the satisfaction of confounding an infamous calumny," and so saying, he looked keenly at Sartilly.

"It is the best thing you can do," said the chief coolly.

"I do not ask you for advice. I merely want to know where you wish me to go."

"To the prefecture; we have a vehicle at the door."

"Very well; this gentleman will go with us, no doubt," said Monsieur de Noreff, pointing to the viscount; "he must wish to see the end of the honourable mission he has undertaken."

Sartilly, pale with rage, could with difficulty restrain himself, but a gesture from the chief calmed him. "Will you have the kindness to accompany me, sir?" said the functionary to the man whom he already considered his prisoner.

Monsieur de Noreff rang the bell. "You will permit me to change my clothes," he said, in a jeering voice.

"Certainly, provided you do it here. I do not wish your servants to know of what is going on."

"But I may have need of them, if only so that they may inform Madame de Noreff of my departure."

On hearing these words the officer could not conceal a smile of incredulity, and he retorted: "Your house will be visited this evening by an investigating magistrate, and if Madame de Noreff is here, she can then be informed."

This shaft did not appear to wound the accused, as for a moment or so his attention seemed to be elsewhere; in fact, his face had become animated, his eyes shone, and his brow cleared—it seemed as if he had forgotten what was passing around him, and indeed, his attitude was that of a man listening.

A distant rumble was heard approaching from the boulevard, and soon it became so distinct that one would tell that a carriage was coming towards the house at full speed. The chief listened, and Sartilly, who was moving towards the gallery, stopped short, seized by a vague presentiment. Then the noise ceased, and a deep bass voice called out: "Door, if you please."

Some one had arrived in great haste, and the new arrival must have had a skilful coachman, and fleet, well-trained horses, if one could judge by the precision with which the carriage had stopped at the gate.

An evil smile could now be seen on the contracted lips of Monsieur de Noreff, who, without saying a word, went straight to one of the windows that overlooked the courtyard, and opened it. Sartilly and the chief followed him, and looked out, both realising that something strange was about to happen.

The colossal porter had left his lodge to open the heavy gate, which could now be heard turning on its hinges. As soon as the way was clear, an elegant barouche, drawn by two superb bay horses, drove in and stopped short in front of the steps.

On the right hand side of the back seat, wrapped in a fur cloak and

rugs, a woman sat, or rather reclined, on some blue silk cushions, waiting with perfect composure for the footman to lower the steps. Having heard the window open, she raised her head, looking up in the direction of the conservatory, and scarcely had she done so, than Sartilly uttered a cry of terror and surprise, for he had recognised this woman's pale face and golden hair. Behind him, too, he heard a mocking voice saying these words: "I told you that Madame de Noreff would return at four o'clock."

Having alighted from the carriage, the lady slowly ascended the house steps, and Sartilly watched all her motions with feverish attention. De Noreff, still in the same sarcastic tone, was saying:

"Do you insist, gentlemen, upon Madame de Noreff's coming here to tell you herself that I have not murdered her?"

"It is absolutely necessary for me to speak to Madame de Noreff," replied the chief, whose manner was already less imperative; "but we can go to the drawing-room, and spare her the inconvenience of coming here."

"It is unnecessary, she is coming." Scarcely, indeed, had Monsieur de Noreff spoken, than a light footfall was heard coming along the gallery. The viscount, in a state of distraction, looked at his companion, and read doubt and anxiety in his eyes. The functionary was thinking that his position might be compromised by this foolish affair, and was anxiously waiting for the identity of the woman to be proved so as to decide upon his course.

"Is it really she?" thought Sartilly in mortal dread.

The woman appeared at the entrance of the conservatory, and parting with her gloved hands the branches of the exotic plants before her she advanced with a graceful motion, not destitute of timidity, showing only her bust and face.

The viscount hesitated for a moment, but a ray of sunshine coming through the windows suddenly lighted up the features of the new-comer, whose pale face, large dark blue eyes, and reddish golden hair became distinctly visible. It was really the woman of the Champs Elysées. The livid bloody head which he, Sartilly, had seen in the morning seemed to have come to life before his eyes, and he wondered what prodigy or miracle had effected such a resurrection. For a few seconds all were mute, the triumphant Monsieur de Noreff looking alternatively at his dismayed visitors and his astonished wife. The chief noticed the embarrassment of Sartilly, who was in vain trying to recover his composure, when suddenly the woman spoke in a deep voice abounding in singular inflexions. The words of a Northern language fell from her lips with the penetrating harmony of a sweet song. Monsieur de Noreff said a few words in the same language, but spoke rapidly, in short sentences like a man giving urgent orders.

The chief frowned and muttered between his teeth, "It isn't German they are speaking now."

The viscount, on his side, was lost in a profound reverie.

"Madame de Noreff is in the habit of speaking the Russian language with me," said the master of the house, calmly, "but she understands French, and if you think it necessary to ask any explanation of her——"

"It would, I think, be quite superfluous," replied the chief, adding mentally, "particularly as you have just warned her. I ought to have brought Jottrat with me, as he understands all languages."

"Then," continued De Noreff, still cold and scoffing, "you are willing to believe that I have not murdered my wife?"

Before answering, the functionary darted a last questioning glance at the unfortunate Sartilly, whose colour changed every moment; large drops of sweat stood upon his forehead, and his downcast countenance so plainly said, "I have been deceived," that the chief thought it useless to ask him for a humiliating avowal of his error.

Since the arrival of Madame de Noreff, the skilful functionary had rapidly reviewed the situation in which he was placed, and he understood it perfectly. Accustomed, for many years, to complicated intrigues and unpleasant tasks, he knew how to make up his mind without loss of time.

The plan he adopted was usually of a nature not to compromise his personal interests; and on this occasion he did not depart from his habitual prudence. In a moment he had decided upon the best course to pursue. In his opinion, Monsieur de Noreff was, in some way, connected with the mysterious disappearance of the Marquis de Mensignac; but it was also certain, that his wife was living, and that Sartilly had been deceived by some chance resemblance. After a false step of this kind, the only thing that could be done for the moment was to accomplish a retreat, for the evidence did not justify an immediate arrest, and to persist in conveying the Swede to the prefecture, in spite of the proof of Sartilly's error, would have been a course fraught with responsibility which the judicious functionary wished to avoid; he therefore resolved to abandon the case for the present, and to deal with it later on should occasion offer, and under more favourable circumstances.

"Well, sir," he said, to Monsieur de Noreff, in a courteous and persuasive tone which he knew how to assume when needed, "the slandered administration to which I belong sometimes acts over hastily, but it always knows how to repair an error. Believing the information that was laid before me, I took a step that I deeply regret, but I am happy to say that my mission is over, and we are about to retire."

Sartilly, who, while his companion was speaking, had been closely observing Monsieur de Noreff, thought he could see his eyes flash with delight on hearing these words; however, if this enigmatical personage had felt any emotion of the kind, he did not let it appear in his cold and haughty answer. Indeed, it seemed that their respective parts were changed, and that from being accused, Monsieur de Noreff had become accuser, his language and attitude contrasting strongly with the disconcerted mien of his two visitors. Moreover, the last blow came to crush the viscount already overwhelmed with shame.

Madame de Noreff slowly emerged from the foliage by which she was half hidden, advancing a few steps into the conservatory, and as she came forward, Sartilly involuntarily retreated without being able to take his eyes off her. Among the vivid impressions of the moment a distant souvenir is often mingled, and thus, on seeing Madame de Noreff walk forward, Edmond involuntarily thought of Jeanne's narrative, and of the woman dressed in red, who in the days of her childhood had passed before her crib. Why did his imagination recall the distant night of the old Marquis de Mensignac's death, rather than the young girl's later vision? He could not tell, but it seemed to him that he now certainly beheld the phantom that had frightened Jeanne in her childhood. Perhaps there existed some secret coincidence between this impression and the appearance of Madame de Noreff, whom he found, on closer inspection, to be much

older than he had believed her at first. Her regular features, her skin of snowy whiteness, and her bright eyes, produced complete illusion at a distance; but now that he was near her, in the full light, the wrinkles on her brow, the brown circle round her eyes, the bluish tint of her temples became visible, and the expression of her face was entirely changed. She was a woman in full maturity, who must have been admirably beautiful some years before, but who was no longer in the first bloom of youth. However, strange to say, it seemed to Edmond that the unknown foreigner of the Champs Elysées was not this Madame de Noreff, but the other woman, the victim whose bloody head he had seen on the snow in the Bois de Boulogne. He did his best to drive away this fantastic idea, and looked steadily at Madame de Noreff till their eyes met. The likeness between herself and the murdered woman of the Bois de Boulogne was striking, and the similarity of their hair completed the illusion. Their age alone was not the same. Previously, however, he had only seen Madame de Noreff in a carriage, and at a distance, at which she must necessarily have looked younger, for it was certainly she who stood before him. The murdered woman resembled her, that was all.

"Who are these gentlemen?" she asked in French, but with a decided Russian accent.

Monsieur de Noreff immediately answered her, and he took care not to lose this opportunity of giving a home thrust to his enemies. "This gentleman is one of the chiefs of the police force," he said, with an evil smile; "and this one," turning towards Edmond, "is a man of fashion, who plays the detective for his amusement."

The viscount raised his head at this sarcasm, and was going to make a bitter reply, but Madame de Noreff prevented his doing so by asking, in a harmonious voice: "What is this gentleman's name?"

"My name is of very little consequence," replied Edmond, "I am the friend of the Marquis de Mensignac, and I have the right to try and find his murderer."

The viscount had spoken rapidly in order to hide his embarrassment, and he was about to turn and leave the room when he was struck by the peculiar expression of Madame de Noreff's face. Her large eyes were half closed, her mouth had become contracted, and her complexion, already very pale, had grown almost livid.

"On the occasion of my first journey to France I was acquainted with the Marquis Adhémar de Mensignac," she said, after a short pause; "but he is dead."

"His son also is dead; he was murdered last night, and it is his murder I wish to avenge," replied Sartilly, looking at Monsieur de Noreff defiantly.

It was time to put an end to this scene, and the chief of the detective police did so by taking his leave with studied politeness. As for the viscount his preoccupation was so great that he followed his companion mechanically, and found himself in the Rue de Varennes without knowing how he had got there. The cab was still waiting, the driver being asleep on the box; while the second vehicle stood at the corner of the deserted boulevard.

"I want to say a word to Jottrat before starting," said the officer; "come with me, I know where to find him."

Skirting the courtyard wall he proceeded to a small street, or rather passage, which separated Monsieur de Noreff's property from the stables.

of a neighbouring house. On reaching the corner of this blind alley he whistled softly, and Jottrat appeared so quickly that one might have almost thought he had sprung out of the wall. He came forward with that rapid, silent step which is acquired by the daily practice of detective functions.

"You have seen nothing?" asked the chief, in a low voice.

"No; nothing."

"Then we have failed; the Russian has won, and we shall never know what goes on in that house yonder."

"Perhaps we shall, all the same," said Jottrat, after a short silence.

Half-an-hour later, Edmond de Sartilly and the chief arrived at the Prefecture of Police. They had remained silent during the drive, both feeling discontented with the result of their enterprise; and, as always happens in similar cases, each throwing the blame upon his companion. The chief was annoyed with the viscount for having been so badly informed, forgetting the police notes respecting the antecedents of Monsieur de Noreff, which had determined him to act so quickly. Sartilly, on his side, thought that the chief of police had failed in prudence at the outset and in perseverance at the end, forgetting that his own affirmations had mainly induced the functionary to embark on this hazardous venture.

However, the chief consoled himself by thinking that he could easily justify himself to the prefect, as the notes respecting the equivocal foreigner were full of unfavourable information; still, at the same time, he resolved that zeal should never carry him so far again. The viscount, for his part, had determined that he would henceforth have nothing further to do with the police, since this affair had been so badly conducted, and he reflected that he had only himself to depend upon if he wished to discover the murderers.

There are natures which difficulties stimulate and which obstacles excite, and Sartilly would willingly have renounced attending to this affair had the chief seemed disposed to do his duty; but now that he expected that he would not obtain any help in his task, he was seized with a violent desire to clear up this dark mystery in person. Moreover still more serious motives urged him to persevere. He had an innate conviction that his friend had fallen a victim to some infernal plot, in which Monsieur de Noreff had been the prime mover, and that there existed some terrible secret between the Swede and the Mensignacs. This secret must first be discovered, and a friend alone could penetrate it without exposing the honour of the name which Jeanne bore.

If the enterprise were left to the care of police hirelings perhaps some terrible story might be divulged. Some secret stain might be discovered calculated to tarnish the Mensignacs for ever. So was it prudent to leave the work of searching into the past doings of this noble family to mercenary agents? No, thought Sartilly, he was the friend of Mademoiselle de Mensignac and alone had the right to defend and avenge her, since, in doing so, it would no doubt be necessary to inquire into the lives both of the Marquis Adhémar, who was dead and buried, and of the Marquis Roger, who if not dead had at any-rate disappeared.

"I will allow no one to help me, and yet I will succeed," Sartilly said to himself as he alighted from the cab, at the door of the Prefecture of Police.

The first person he set his eyes upon was Toby, holding Ralph and walking him up and down the square. The viscount since his furious race had completely forgotten the poor animal, but he felt delighted to see him

again ; still, without taking time to ask his groom by what miraculous chance he had repaired to the prefecture, he mounted the steps that led to the office of the chief of the detective service.

"Will you have the kindness, sir, to sacrifice another hour of your time?" said the functionary. "Your presence is indispensable as regards the unpleasant business which we still have to attend to this afternoon. However, as soon as that is over, I trust that there will be no further need of disturbing you."

The chief had now become as cold as he had been ardent, and while remaining ceremoniously polite he plainly evinced by his manner his intention of not allowing Sartilly to take any further part in the official investigation. The viscount took care not to protest against this decision for it agreed admirably with his own views, and the only thing that he asked himself as he paced the paved passages, crossed so often by criminals of all descriptions, was what remaining service the police expected of him.

The subaltern detectives, who had arrived in the second cab almost at the same time as the chief and Sartilly, had now retired, with the exception of the man called Jottrat, who had mounted guard outside the garden wall. He kept at a respectful distance behind the viscount and his superior, but a turn in the passage gave Edmond an opportunity of looking at him. This detective was the only person who had not despaired of success, for Sartilly remembered what he had said when the chief declared that nothing would ever be discovered as to what went on in Monsieur de Noreff's house: "Perhaps we shall find out, all the same." Thus had Jottrat spoken, and Sartilly, remembering these words, gave the detective a keen look.

Jottrat was certainly worthy of attention. He was tall and broad-shouldered, and he had the erect bearing of a soldier, but his features were delicate and pleasant, contrasting singularly with his powerful figure. In his youth he must have been a very handsome man, but he now appeared to be fifty years old ; still age had not bent his form, or impaired his features—it had merely lent, as it were, an impenetrable mask to his face. His eyes were still bright and quick ; and although they were almost always cast down, there was nothing hypocritical in their expression ; indeed when he raised them one was struck by their frank clearness. Strange to say, this subordinate detective inspired Sartilly with a certain amount of sympathy, whereas he only felt repulsion for the chief of the service.

Jottrat, he thought, might be able to help him in finding the assassins, and he determined to apply to him if need were ; and indeed he had almost decided upon speaking to him on the spot, when, on arriving at the door of the office, he realised that the moment was inopportune.

There were already four or five persons in the office, among whom Edmond recognised Versoix, who looked extremely pale from the fatigue and emotions of the past night. The fat baron was also there, still panting from the exertion of mounting the steps, while the commissary of Saint Cloud, still in waiting, was complaisantly explaining the affair to a fourth person who was dressed in black from head to foot, carefully shaven and decorated with the rosette of an officer of the Legion of Honour. He had an official demeanour and an intelligent face. The viscount divined that he must be a medical man, and at the same time he realised what was going to take place. The authorities had evidently summoned the three witnesses of the affair so that they might be present at a medical

examination of the head, and Edmond shuddered with repugnance in thinking of the impending spectacle.

Versois and the baron came forward and shook hands with him ; they were both quite calm, and did not, of course, suspect the anguish from which Sartilly had been suffering ever since he had parted from them in the Bois de Boulogne ; for they were quite ignorant of the scenes that had taken place both at M. de Mensignac's and at M. de Noreff's. The viscount considered it altogether inadvisable to speak to them of the enterprise from which he had just returned and so he limited his conversation to those commonplace remarks which are generally exchanged after an event of this kind.

"Gentlemen," said the chief, who wished to set the lookers-on at their ease, so far as the duty they had to discharge was concerned, "I am obliged to confront you again with a very disagreeable spectacle, but it will suffice for you to identify the head and sign the report ; you will not be obliged to be present at the post-mortem examination which will follow. All these unpleasant formalities can be easily accomplished, however, since the doctor is ready, and if you will come with me, I will take you to the room where the head is."

Then, having made a sign to Jottrat to join the party, he opened a door, and passed down a long corridor leading to the apartment which was set aside for operations of this kind. As a rule, legal post-mortem examinations are performed at the Morgue, the apartment at the prefecture only being utilised in exceptional cases like the present one. The room which the party entered was a large one, paved with flagstones, and having white-washed walls and two very large windows. In the middle of the chamber, on a large stone table, the head was lying swathed in the black wrapper in which it had been found. On the right there was a stone filter with a basin half full of water, and at the end of the room six cane chairs were ranged against the wall. One felt a contraction of the heart on entering this cold, bare place. On crossing its threshold, all conversation ceased, and the viscount and his friends uncovered their heads. They were in the presence of death.

Jottrat locked the door and joined the group that surrounded the table. The doctor removed the black wrapper and the head appeared, the sight of the features, now exposed to the full light, causing a general murmur of admiration. An exclamation of astonishment, moreover, escaped the chief of the detective police. Sartilly had succeeded in controlling his feelings, but the officer, struck by the strange resemblance between the features of the severed head and Madame de Noreff, looked alternately at the pale remains and at the livid viscount.

"Ah ! now I understand the mistake," said the functionary, as if speaking to himself.

Edmond on his side was not wondering but reflecting. In his mind's eye, he again beheld the woman of the Champs Elysées and the woman of the Noreff mansion, and this question arose in his mind, "Which was she?"

"Gentlemen," said the chief, addressing himself to the viscount and his friends, "you recognise this head as the one which was found by you this morning in the Bois de Boulogne, under the circumstances which you stated to the commissary?"

"Certainly," said both the baron and Versois, while Sartilly merely made an affirmative gesture.

"Very good ; then you will have to sign the official report," rejoined

the functionary. "In the meantime the doctor will proceed with his first examination, and if you like, gentlemen, you are at liberty to remain."

No one showed any anxiety to leave. The doctor was inspecting the head attentively, feeling and turning it in every sense, with the indifference that the habit of anatomical examination imparts.

"This person was in full strength and young, remarkably well constituted and formed," said he, in the calm tone of a professor giving a lesson; "she was a woman of twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, probably born in the north of Europe, if I can judge by the peculiar form of the skull."

"Do you think it possible, doctor, to indicate the manner of her death?" suddenly asked the chief, who had for some minutes seemed deeply preoccupied.

"I don't think about it, for I am positive that this woman has been guillotined," answered the doctor, quietly.

"Guillotined!" cried the astonished bystanders.

"Beheaded, if you like the word better," said the unmoved physician, "but certainly by some mechanism similar to that of the guillotine."

"Excuse me, doctor," said the chief, "but this is a very serious matter, and if you can explain how this took place it would be very useful to us in our investigations."

"First of all, there is full evidence that the head was not detached from the body after death. The character of the wound gives me absolute certainty on that point. Moreover, the section is a clean one; there are no abrasions, no tearing of the skin, and it will be seen that the neck is severed close to the fourth vertebra of the spinal column, as generally happens in criminal executions. So smooth a decapitation could not have been accomplished with a sword or hatchet."

"It is incredible," said the chief, in a low voice.

"And look," continued the doctor, examining the neck nearer, "I see very well how the cut was made."

There was a thrill of curiosity among the lookers-on, while the medical man continued imperturbably: "The blow was given from left to right, and not from above."

"I do not understand very well," said Jottrat, who had approached the table, and was watching the examination with feverish attention.

"It is very simple, however. Suppose an instrument of punishment in which the knife is placed horizontally instead of vertically, as is the case with the guillotine."

"I have seen shears of that kind in forges," muttered the chief of the detective police.

"Quite so," rejoined the doctor, "they are employed for cutting enormous bars of iron, so you can easily understand that it is by no means difficult to sever a human head from the trunk when one has an appliance of that kind at one's disposal."

"Then was the crime committed in a forge?" said the baron, stupidly, "Why, I own one in the Oise——"

"Excuse me," replied the doctor, "I have advanced nothing of the kind; moreover, judicial suppositions do not come within my province. I state facts but make no surmises; besides, there may exist other instruments which might produce the same result."

"But what are they?" persisted the inquisitive baron,



"They may exist, but I do not know them," answered the medical man, rather coldly.

"Excuse me, doctor," said Jottrat, timidly, "but I want to ask you if science furnishes any means of knowing how the murderer acted. Did he surprise his victim, or did he murder her after a struggle?"

"That is a difficult question to decide; however, the probabilities are that the victim was beheaded unawares, and I will show you why I think so. First of all, the face does not bear any marks of a struggle, and moreover, the features have retained that placidity of expression peculiar to people who die unexpectedly. Finally, what is still more conclusive, the hair is not even disarranged,—look, the plaits are carefully gathered together, and one might almost conclude that the crime took place in the evening, for women hardly dress their hair in this manner in the morning."

While speaking thus, the imperturbable doctor passed his hand over the victim's superb golden-coloured hair. Sartilly shuddered from head to foot. Pale, with haggard eyes and contracted lips, he looked without saying a word at the work with which the man of science was engaged. Each of the frigid remarks that fell from the doctor's lips struck him in the heart, and awakened in his mind a thousand mournful thoughts. He involuntarily connected the ingenious deductions he had just heard with circumstances known only to himself, and tried to combine them with the other events of the fatal night; however, the more he thought of Jeanne's narrative the more he realised the impossibility of reconciling it with the facts which the doctor had pointed out. His ideas grew clouded to such a degree that he would willingly have given a supernatural explanation to the frightful reality before him. They could not be of this world, he thought, the beings who wreaked revenge by such strange means, and men had not invented such an unknown form of death. Then the figure of the woman in red rose up before his troubled imagination, and he felt the blood curdling in his veins.

While the doctor was speaking, the viscount turned away from the pale dead face, but when all became silent again, in spite of himself, he felt compelled to gaze upon this severed head which subjected him to a horrible fascination. The eyes of the victim were open, and the motionless eyeballs appeared to be looking at him, while the lips, half closed, seemed to be speaking, and Sartilly, carried away by his emotion, almost expected to hear them pronounce the name of the murderer. However, the cold, even voice of the medical man aroused him at last from this gloomy reverie.

"Look," said the doctor, "here is another proof in support of my theory—one of the tresses of this woman's hair has been cut off by the very blade that severed her head, and it is now evident that she was suddenly struck, and did not try to defend herself. Her head, caught, no doubt, in some mechanism similar to one of those I have described to you, fell without her being able to make a motion to save it."

Keen emotion seized hold of Sartilly, for he carried about him the sad relic which he had picked up in the library, and the circumstances in which he found it reverted to his memory. His first impulse was to show it, for this material proof would perhaps facilitate the researches of the police; but he reflected that in acting thus he would hand the mysteries of the Mensignac mansion, and perhaps the secrets of the family, over to the prying eyes of the detective force. It would also mean renouncing the mission which he had mentally taken upon himself, and accepting the help of auxiliaries whom he dreaded.

"No, no," murmured he, "I will act alone."

"I think," now said the chief of the detective police, "that the first examination will suffice; when our investigation is a little more advanced we will have recourse again to the doctor. I shall at present have the head embalmed, as it is the only proof we have of the crime; still it is worth more than any other," added the chief, smiling.

"Do you really hope to discover the murderer?" asked Versoix, rather foolishly.

"I never despair, and I have unravelled more complicated affairs than this one," replied the chief.

The doctor had finished his examination, and was busy wrapping the head in the black cloth, with a phlegm which contrasted strongly with the emotion imprinted on the faces of all the bystanders.

"Come, gentlemen," said the chief, turning towards the door. Sartilly, slowly followed the little group, but he could not avoid casting a last look at the black veil and as he did so he heard these words whispered in his ear:

"Will you allow me to go and see you, sir?"

He turned and recognised the detective with whose face and bearing he had been so much struck. Jottrat's attitude and the expression of his eyes so plainly said, "Do not disdain my services," that Sartilly determined not to refuse this unexpected help.

"To-morrow, at my house, at noon," he replied, and to himself he added: "God has perhaps sent this man to me so that this crime may not remain unpunished."

#### IV

##### JOTTRAT THE DETECTIVE.

EDMOND DE SARTILLY lived in the Rue d'Astorg, in a house situated between a court-yard and a garden. In those days men of fashion did not think it necessary to keep a stud of race-horses; besides, Sartilly's fortune, although a very handsome one for the times, did not warrant any great expenditure. With his income of fifty thousand francs a year he kept three horses in his stables and employed a valet and a groom. Small broughams, now so much in vogue, had not then been invented, and the viscount's coach-house only contained a cabriolet and a tilbury.

Although this would now be considered a very modest establishment, at that period it was quite sufficient to enable the viscount to cut a fairly decent figure in Paris. Being of good birth, and possessing extensive family connections, he had free entrance into the aristocratic circles of the Faubourg Saint Germain, although he occasionally frequented more joyous, but not quite such choice districts. For a few years past however, he had not much availed himself of his connections, for to the whirl of fashionable life he preferred the society of a few intimate friends. The dearest amongst these was assuredly Roger de Mensignac, and the projected marriage with Jeanne had drawn their ties still closer. Sartilly led, therefore, a rather isolated life, and the disappearance of his friend would have been a terrible catastrophe to him, even if it had not been fraught with unknown but terrible danger for Jeanne.

It was not the loss of fortune that disquieted him, as he knew that the noble young girl never worried about opulence or display, and he felt almost glad that she should be less wealthy; for when he had believed her heiress to a fortune far superior to his own, honourable scruples had for a long time prevented him from thinking of her. Now, however, that she was poor and without a protector his most ardent desire was to marry her, and the unexpected events that had occurred gave him the opportunity of realising this wish. He felt a presentiment, however, that the invisible enemies who had made away with Roger would persevere in their designs against all who bore the name of *Mensignac*. The death of the old marquis had been accompanied by strange circumstances, and the life of his son had been mysterious in many respects. So it might be that his disappearance was connected with some terrible family secret.

Sartilly passed part of the night, following upon that terrible day, in connecting the mysterious past with recent events, and after long and painful reflections he fell asleep, his slumber being disturbed by frightful dreams, from which he awoke with a start.

Although it was bright daylight his lamp was still burning, but his weary eyes, shunning the light, closed again despite himself, and he felt that physical prostration which always follows upon great moral shocks, while his exhausted mind again wandered away in vague reflections. His room, furnished with elegant simplicity, and brightly lighted by the wintry sun, seemed to him cold and dark. The fire blazing cheerfully in the white marble chimney-place, the gay-coloured *Smyrna* carpet, the china and crystal that shone on the dressing-table, all the material comforts that a rich man finds himself surrounded with on awaking, had lost their charm. Sartilly, turned his eyes to a large portrait of Roger hanging opposite his bed, and it seemed to him as if a sad smile lit up his friend's features. At the same time his over-excited brain evoked *Jeanne's* image, and he fancied that the portrait were going to speak and say to him, "Protect her."

Wishing to escape from this fascination, he rang, leapt out of bed, put on a morning costume, and sank down in an arm-chair by the side of the fire. The valet who came in was a perfect contrast to Toby. At the first glance at him it could be seen that he was one of the few surviving servants of the old style, whom the present generation know very little about. Born in the house where they served, and devoted to the family of which they considered themselves members, these worthy fellows deserved the freely granted privilege of chatting with their masters, and sometimes even of expostulating with them. The valets who appear as confidants in the comedies written in the last century were not then personages of the imagination, and the encroachment of English manners alone led to their being replaced by those mute slaves who rob and betray their masters without daring to act familiarly.

Antoine was a perfect type of the servant of the old days. He was a son of one of *Edmond's* farmers, born on his domain, and his father's foster-brother. He was now sixty, and for forty years he had never left the Sartillys, with whom he expected to die. His honest face had retained a rather rustic expression, and although his dress was of irreproachable cleanliness, it lacked the *Britannic* stylishness to which all valets now-a-days lay claim. He worshipped his master, who in return felt a real affection for him; and he cordially detested Toby, who had an equal dislike to him. Sartilly, by taking a groom of English training, had

made a concession to the taste of the day, and to the necessity of having his stable properly attended to ; but he always appreciated the simple devotion of his faithful Antoine, and after the bad night he had just spent it was a solace and relief to see him come into his room.

The old servant brought a letter on a tray, and he had evidently recognised the handwriting of the address, for he presented it with the joyous eagerness of a servant sure of pleasing his master. However, comical disappointment appeared on his face when he saw the viscount frown and break the seal with marked agitation. While Sartilly was reading the note, the valet watched the expression of his face, and when at the end of the perusal he saw him fall into a profound reverie, he ventured to ask in a timid voice : "Is Mademoiselle Jeanne ill?"

"No, Antoine, no," answered Sartilly, absently. "I am going to see her this afternoon. Will you tell Toby to have the tilbury in readiness at four o'clock?"

"Hum!" said Antoine, in a significant tone. "I don't know exactly whether he is here, for if he behaves to-day as he did yesterday and the day before, I am afraid he will keep you waiting, sir."

"Why, what did he do yesterday?" asked Sartilly, rather surprised.

"He was not here a moment sir, and there is nothing astonishing in it, for he has strange friends who come to see him."

"Come, explain yourself, Antoine ; as a rule, Toby behaves very well, and he cannot be always on the spot as you are. Besides, on the day before yesterday I took him with me in the cabriolet to the opera ball, and afterwards to the Bois de Boulogne, and it seems to me that I saw him yesterday after that," said the viscount, trying to call back his recollections.

"Well, sir, he came in after five o'clock, bringing Ralph half-foundered, and he went to bed, saying he could not stand any more fatigue ; but that did not hinder him from going out again last night, and coming back this morning, as he often does."

Sartilly was no longer listening to Antoine, for an idea had just struck him, bringing back forgotten memories, just as a ray of sunshine suddenly brings out the striking points of an edifice. At first he tried to think how it was that he had seen his groom holding Ralph outside the Prefecture of Police, and how it was that the young fellow had guessed that he, Sartilly, was at the prefecture, a place that he had never visited before. Then he thought of Jeanne's narrative, and her positive declaration that she had seen Toby leaving the Mensignac mansion in the middle of the night ; and, had it not seemed too absurd, all these things combined might have awakened a suspicion in his mind as to Toby's loyalty. At all events, as the letter which he had just received from Jeanne contained a request for him to go and see her the same afternoon, he determined to profit by this opportunity to clear up the circumstance. There still remained the groom's unexplained appearance on the Place Dauphine, and Sartilly, vaguely puzzled, wished to make some inquiries about it immediately.

"Go and see if Toby is in the stable, and bring him here," he said to Antoine.

"I will send him to you, sir," said the old servant, who did not appear to have any wish to meet Toby in his master's presence.

A few minutes afterwards the groom came in, holding his glengarry cap in his hand.

"At what hour did you bring Ralph back yesterday?" asked Sartilly.

"At twenty five minutes past five o'clock," replied the groom, with singular precision.

"Who told you that I had gone to the Prefecture of Police?"

"Why, sir, in the Bois de Boulogne you ordered me to hire a horse to bring the cabriolet back to Paris. On arriving here at twelve o'clock I thought, sir, you might want me at Monsieur de Mensignac's to groom Ralph; but on reaching there, the porter told me you had left in great haste, and it occurred to me, sir, that you had no doubt gone to the police about—about the head."

Toby, who had shown an instant's hesitation in pronouncing these last words, added in a perfectly steady voice: "And as Ralph was a little injured I took him to the veterinary surgeon's on coming home."

His answers were so clearly given that Sartilly reproached himself for having thought for an instant that a boy like him could be implicated in the previous night's events. The groom did not seem to be a fellow to take a part, even a subaltern one, in a conspiracy, so his master hastily dismissed him, telling him to have the tilbury ready by four o'clock.

However, when alone again, Sartilly relapsed into the same gloomy thoughts; and while trying to recall the most trifling circumstances of his adventure, he remembered the police-agent with whose intelligent face he had been struck. At first he had a confused recollection that this man had appeared inclined to continue the investigation in part, if the chief of the detective service abandoned it, and then he remembered that the fellow was to pay him a visit at twelve o'clock. That hour was now approaching, and the prospect of this meeting changed Sartilly's thoughts, for he hoped to find an active and skilful auxiliary in this humble agent of whose zeal he felt certain, for he had not forgotten the interest he had taken in the examinations. He longed for his arrival, and began walking up and down the room looking at the clock.

"Fool that I am!" he suddenly cried, striking his forehead; "I forgot to give him my address."

This mishap raised the viscount's irritation to the highest pitch, and the more he thought of the services this man might render, the more he regretted not having made better arrangements for meeting him, for he could not now send to the prefecture without compromising both himself and the agent. He was beginning to fear that he must renounce all hope of having this interview, when old Antoine came in and announced that "a man" had called to see his master. Antoine had not called the visitor "a gentleman," and judging by the disdainful way in which he spoke, the new-comer might be the detective. The viscount's curiosity was aroused, and also speedily satisfied, for Antoine gave him a card on which he read the name of "Jottrat."

"Show the person in," said Sartilly, eager and delighted to find that the police agent had not disappointed him. Although he had only caught a glimpse of Jottrat's face in the passage at the prefecture, and again near the table on which the doctor had examined the severed head, the detective's lineaments had remained engraved on his memory with singular clearness. Some persons produce an undefinable impression, and the viscount, in remarking the obscure police agent, had yielded to an influence which he felt unable to explain.

At last Antoine raised the door hanging, and ushered in the visitor, without however announcing his name, which he no doubt considered unworthy of being proclaimed in a loud voice. Moreover, the appearance of

the agent agreed marvellously well with the quiet manner that Antoine had assumed in ushering him into the room, for he had bent his tall figure, rounded his shoulders, and, in fact, quite set aside his military bearing. His face bore a marked expression of respectful sympathy, and his intelligent eyes seemed to be entreating the viscount to forgive his intrusion. Upon the whole, his attitude was that of a man who felt the honour he was receiving, but it was neither fawning nor servile; in one word, the detective had the air of a man who had come to offer useful help and nothing more.

Sartilly observed all this at a glance, and at once felt cordially disposed. This "police spy" showed such tact in his demeanour that he rose to the dignity of a man in the eyes of the viscount, who began the conversation in a cheery tone of voice. "I thank you for having come," he said, "but I began to fear that I should not see you, having forgotten to give you my address."

The detective could not restrain a smile at the doubt which the viscount had so artlessly expressed. "I knew it, sir," he answered, in a voice the penetrating softness of which both astonished and charmed Sartilly, "and if I had dared, I would have called here last evening."

"You knew where I lived," said Sartilly, surprised. "Have I, then, without knowing it, been under supervision, and have you had charge of—"

He did not finish, but the agent understood him for he flushed. "No, sir," he answered, calmly, "there was no need of that; your name is one of those that all Paris knows, and besides, I had formerly heard it often enough not to forget it now."

"How was that?" said Sartilly, more and more astonished.

"Why, I spent my childhood in Normandy—in the district where your family estates are situated, and later on I served in the regiment which Colonel de Sartilly, your father, commanded."

There was a moment's silence. The viscount felt more constrained since Jottrat had spoken thus, for what could be said to a man who, after being a soldier, had adopted the profession of a spy? He merely pointed to a chair, and seated himself by the fire, waiting for the detective to explain himself. Jottrat availed himself of the proffered chair, without showing the least embarrassment.

"Well, sir," he said, "I have come, as you have perhaps already divined, to offer you my services in trying to find out the perpetrators of the crime which was committed on the night before last."

"I accept your offer," replied Sartilly, "and I beg of you to fix the price you set upon your services."

"Will you allow me, sir," answered Jottrat, after an instant's hesitation, "will you allow me to postpone all talk on that point until I have succeeded?"

"Very good; but will you succeed? That seems to me very doubtful after the defeat we met with yesterday at Monsieur de Noreff's house. Your chief himself is very much discouraged, and I fear he intends renouncing the investigation."

"He certainly will renounce it."

"Then it is without his knowledge and authority that you intend to act?"

"We *must* do without him," answered Jottrat. And as Sartilly looked at the detective without appearing to understand, he resumed—speaking as

if he wished to impress each of his words upon the mind of his companion : "Affairs of this kind invariably take a course that I am very well acquainted with, having observed a good deal for twenty years. A crime is committed, and the more mysterious it is, and the more difficult it is to discover the perpetrators, the more zeal and ardour the police at first display. They start in search of traces of the criminals, the whole army of detectives is employed, and every one acts with vigour, promptitude, and sagacity. If some correct information is gained unexpectedly, the assassin is lost. That is the first period of the search. But when the authorities have followed a wrong scent, when they have met with impossibilities, suspected people whose positions are seemingly impregnable, then the activity of the police diminishes : as they have been mistaken once, they fear a second failure, and become timid. We shall reach this state of affairs in a few days' time. Then other crimes are committed ; these are fresh, and the police hope to manage them better, and grow disheartened with the old affair. All their strength and activity are engaged in other searches ; and as for the earlier affair, they only rely upon what a happy chance may bring. The great Parisian current drawing everything along with it is the cause of many events being speedily forgotten, and the remembrance of this crime which has occupied all France for three days will gradually fade away. In the course of a month matters will be in the position I have spoken of, and then I shall perhaps prove useful to you."

Sartilly had listened with curiosity to this singular description of practical police affairs, given by a man whose ability he could not doubt, but whose object in thus speaking he failed to divine. As he wished to be more enlightened before advancing farther, he merely gave Jottrat an approving nod.

"The guilty party," said the officer, "passes absolutely through the same phases. We naturally suppose him to be an intelligent man. At the first moment he is armed at all points ; firm, vigilant, and skilful, he is guilty neither of a blunder, nor of any act of imprudence. He has prepared for his defence a firm array of lies, alibis, and so on, and as long as the police pursue him with all their force he remains unassailable. Yesterday my chief called on Monsieur de Noreff to arrest him ; and although I was not present at the interview, I am sure he ended by apologising to him. Well, days, weeks, and months will pass. This great villain is, after all, only a man with human passions and interests. He becomes fatigued by the moral effort that extreme situations require, and gradually his quick and sagacious mind becomes less clear. His nerves relax, because the struggle is over, and his memory weakens as time passes. If he then be attacked and pressed with close questions—if, one by one, inquiries and proofs are taken up, he will contradict himself, betray himself, and be lost. So in a month's time I will open the campaign against Monsieur de Noreff."

"You believe him guilty, then ?"

"He is guilty, and he has accomplices," said Jottrat, in so firm a tone that his conviction seemed a certainty.

"However," said the viscount, rather embarrassed, and still unwilling to mix up the name of his betrothed with this horrible affair, "you are no doubt aware of the coincidence that exists between the murder of that unfortunate woman and the disappearance of my best friend, the Marquis de Mensignac ?"

"Yes, sir; and it is precisely that coincidence that makes me feel sure of tracing the crime to Monsieur de Noreff."

This significant reply threw Sartilly into a state of great perplexity. It was evident that the agent possessed some secret, known to himself alone; to ask him for it, would be to conclude a compact with him—would mean accepting without further examination an alliance with a man who after all was only a spy, and in spite of Sartilly's violent desire to question Jottrat on the spot, he had the strength of mind to restrain himself.

"The explanations you have given me seem very sensible," he said to the detective, "and I am ready to employ you on your own conditions. You will not object, however, if I make inquiries about you; I will take care to do so without compromising you with your superiors."

"I meant to ask you to do so," said Jottrat. "I have nothing to hide in my life but the occupation I follow."

"And why, then, did you choose it?" asked the viscount, forgetting his reserve despite himself.

The detective turned pale, and did not answer immediately.

"I have done wrong, sir," added Sartilly, "to try and pry into your secrets, and I beg you to forget that question. Let us rather speak of the plan we are to follow."

"The secrets of an agent of the detective police cannot interest a man of your position, sir," answered Jottrat sadly. "As to arranging a plan now, I think it would be premature, for the reasons I have had the honour of stating to you. We must let the period of excitement pass by before seriously attacking Monsieur de Noreff, as long as he is on his guard it would be useless to attempt anything against him. I am going to act quietly, collecting information, and as soon as the opportune moment arrives I will call and place myself at your disposal."

"Very well," said Sartilly; "but I may want to see you before then, and how shall I be able to find you without going to the Prefecture of Police?"

"You can see me any evening, from nine to ten o'clock, in the Rue des Marais Saint Germain, No. 19. Ask for Monsieur Pinson."

At the moment Jottrat finished this sentence, the door curtain was gently raised by some one, who must have crossed the ante-chamber with a deal of precaution, as neither the viscount nor the detective had heard any sound. Sartilly, noticing the curtain rise, and feeling very much displeased at being surprised in this manner, rose abruptly and saw with astonishment that the intruder was his groom Toby. The latter was guilty of great indiscretion in entering his master's room without having been summoned, especially as a stranger was there, and Sartilly naturally supposed that some fresh misfortune had taken place. It never occurred to him that Toby would behave in this style without an important motive. "Why have you come here, when I did not ring for you?" the viscount asked, in a harsh tone of voice that was not habitual to him.

"But I really thought I heard your bell, sir," answered the groom, who was not in the least disconcerted; "and as Antoine has just gone out——"

"You must be crazy; go downstairs, and don't forget to have the horse harnessed at four o'clock."

After giving this order, Sartilly raised his eyes and saw with surprise that Jottrat was looking attentively at the groom. The latter had not moved, but was still standing at the door examining the agent with droll persistency.



"You hear when I don't ring, and you don't hear when I speak to you, it appears," said Sartilly, irritated to the last degree.

This time Toby understood, for he let the curtain fall, and disappeared as suddenly as he had come. The groom's foolish prank had irritated the viscount extremely, for he walked up and down fuming, and declaring that it was a terrible nuisance that a man could not dispense with servants.

"Excuse me if I ask you a question, sir," said Jottrat, quietly; "is that young man in the habit of disobeying your orders in this way?"

"Never; on the contrary, he is an admirable servant, and in the three years he has been with me this is the first time such a thing has happened."

"It is very singular," muttered the detective, frowning slightly, as if trying to call back a confused remembrance.

His attitude attracted the attention of the viscount, who thought it necessary not to leave any doubts as to Toby's integrity in the detective's mind. "Upon the whole, I have very little fault to find with my groom, and I think I can depend upon him," said he, in a calmer tone.

"He looked at me a long time," replied Jottrat, "and I thought he already knew me, or wished to be able to recognise me. But what struck me most was his strange resemblance to some one I knew in old times."

"Who was the person?"

"I cannot tell you; my memory was roused on seeing that young man, but I don't feel any certainty. If I knew anything of his origin perhaps I could remember."

"He is, I believe, an illegitimate child; at all events he is an orphan, and English on his mother's side, at least so I have been told. It was poor Roger de Mensignac who recommended him to me, and when I took him into my service, three years ago, he had just left a Welsh gentleman, Sir Arthur Pollock."

"None of these particulars enlighten me," said Jottrat, who still looked thoughtful, "and I beg your pardon for having worried you with my souvenirs, with your mind, too, in the condition it must be. I am going now, and I will wait for your orders before acting."

"No, no," said Sartilly, "do not wait for my orders; search everywhere, and above all, employ every possible means of finding Roger. If you find my poor friend I will reward you in such a way that you will be able to change your profession."

The detective, far from seeming gladdened by this prospect, shook his head sadly, and replied: "As for the search you speak of, my chief will conduct it as well as I could, but it will come to nothing. If the Marquis de Mensignac were living, he would have appeared to save the honour of his name—I know the story of the five hundred thousand francs—and if he is dead, those who have killed him have taken proper precautions to prevent his body being found."

"What do you hope for, then?"

"To avenge him and myself at the same time."

"To avenge yourself; for what reason?" asked the astonished viscount.

The police-agent remained silent, the mask of tranquillity had fallen from his face, his features expressed violent agitation, and although he evidently regretted having said so much, an irresistible feeling impelled him to say yet more; and at length he burst out, in a voice trembling with anger: "I wish to avenge myself on that man Noreff—on that coward, that traitor, that miserable spy."

This last word had scarcely left his lips when he felt conscious of the

impropriety of such an outburst. "Excuse me, sir," he resumed, in a tone of sincere emotion that touched Sartilly, "I forgot what I was myself, and I have also forgotten that you did not receive me here to listen to an account of my personal enmities."

"Tell me, on the contrary, all you know about that man," said the viscount, warmly. "I ask, I beg it of you."

Tears glittered in the eyes of the detective on hearing Sartilly speak to him in this almost affectionate manner, but he managed to recover his composure, and he knew how to give a commonplace answer. "Alas, sir," he said, in his usual formal manner, "I know very little about the man, and the hate that I bear to him is due to vulgar causes. He came to Paris for the first time in 1831—a year after the revolution of July—and a short time afterwards the government learned with certainty that, although born in Sweden, he was a secret agent in the pay of Russia, his special mission being to watch the Polish emigrants, and to report concerning their correspondence with their friends in Warsaw. It was also supposed that he mixed himself with the intrigues against the new monarchy\* which had been established in France; so he was watched, and the affair was put in my hands, and at the moment when I held the threads of the conspiracy, he was skilful enough to destroy the proofs against himself, and I was believed to be a blundering, faithless agent and was sacrificed, remaining for two years without employment. That is the reason of my bitter feelings towards him, and you see that there is nothing in my history calculated to interest you."

Sartilly had listened eagerly to the police-agent's narrative, and an absolute conviction that he had not told him the whole truth took possession of his mind, for he felt that this man must have a more serious grievance against De Noreff than a mere grudge on account of an unmerited disgrace. The viscount now knew enough of Jottrat, and judged him sufficiently well to understand that, despite his emotionless features and his humble looks, he had an ardent soul and a proud heart. An agent of this stamp would not hate without a good reason, but he chose to keep his secret. "What does it matter, after all," thought Sartilly, "provided he serves me well?"

"Listen to me, Jottrat," he said, in a frank and firm tone, calculated to go straight to the heart, so fraught it was with true sincerity. "You detest this man as much as I do, and whatever may be your motives for hating Monsieur de Noreff he is your enemy as well as mine. I wish to employ you to help me in my scheme, and I now only ask you if you are willing to join me."

"I am ready to lay down my life, if necessary, to ensure success," the detective answered, quietly.

"You shall not die, and between us we will crush that venomous scamp. When shall I see you again?"

"If you take my advice, sir, we shall not meet again till a month has elapsed. It will take me that amount of time to prepare my batteries, and I have already had the honour of explaining to you why it would be

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\* That of the House of Orleans which succeeded the main branch of the Bourbon family after Charles X had been overthrown and driven into exile. The Polish refugees were then favourably received in France, and the Czar Nicholas vented his spite by snubbing King Louis Philippe in a variety of ways. At that period there was no talk about an unnatural alliance between liberal France and despotic Russia, as is the case in these degenerate times. — TRANS.

useless to begin the siege before then. To-day is the fourteenth of February—I will see you on the fifteenth of March, and I think it would not be prudent for me to come here, as my presence would be remarked, if only by your servants; while on the contrary, it would be easy for you to come to my house without being seen, and I will take precautions accordingly. My windows are on the fourth floor of No. 19 Rue des Marais. Whenever you see a lamp lighted behind the third window on the right, you may be sure that I am alone, and that you can come up without any danger. Never come excepting in the evening, after nine o'clock, as in the daytime I have my duties to attend to."

"Very well; but if before the fifteenth of March any extraordinary incident should occur on your side, or on mine, do you see any inconvenience in our meeting to speak of it?"

"If you wish to tell me of some important event, nothing will be easier—come to my house when you see the signal at the window. However, if, on the contrary, I have something new to communicate, the case will be more embarrassing, as I think it extremely dangerous to our joint interests for me to show myself here; perhaps, indeed, I have been wrong in coming to-day, and I think it would be better not to meet here, as by our doing so the success of the enterprise might be compromised."

"But you can always write to me?"

"The servants who usher in visitors also receive their master's letters, and the danger is the same."

Sartilly made a gesture expressing entire confidence in the discretion of his servants, but he did not seem to convince Jottrat, for after an instant's silence the latter said: "I will write to you at your club."

"Very well."

"And now, sir, I am going to retire; but before going, allow me to ask you a last question."

"What is it?"

"Have you any immediate need of your groom?"

"Yes, I am going out at four o'clock in my tilbury, and of course I shall take him with me. It is now nearly three o'clock, and Toby must be in the stable at this moment. But why do you wish to know?"

"Because Toby is not in the stable," interrupted Jottrat, who had drawn near the window, "for I see him in the street."

The upper floor of the little pavilion in which the viscount resided was sufficiently raised for one to see over the wall of the courtyard, and Sartilly on looking out perceived his groom at the corner of the Rue d'Astorg and the Rue de la Ville l'Eveque; he was posted on the step of a cab watching, and seemingly expecting something or some one.

"This is too bad," exclaimed the viscount, ringing violently; "it will end by my sending the fellow away. Antoine," he said to his old servant, who was not long in showing his honest face, "go and fetch Toby; he is idling away his time at the other side of the street. Tell him from me that it is time for him to get the tilbury ready. Take him to the stable, and when he is in it, lock the door and bring me the key."

Jottrat could not restrain a smile, and bowing, he said, "We two must certainly succeed." Then, as Sartilly looked at him with some astonishment, the detective pointed with his finger to the groom, who with his head downcast was now following Antoine towards the house, "Thank you for having so well understood me, sir," added Jottrat, "I can now go out without fear of being followed."

## V.

## THE STAIN OF BLOOD.

THE last words spoken by the detective produced a singular impression on the viscount. Having dressed himself hastily he rang for Antoine, gave him the key of the stables again, and finally went down into the courtyard, where he found Toby standing erect at the head of a handsome horse which he had just harnessed. The young fellow was waiting for his master in the dignified attitude of a well-trained groom. Sartilly's first impulse was to question and reprove him for his ill-timed absence, but looking at the lad's rosy, pleasant face he said to himself that Jottrat's suspicions were ridiculous. Besides, Toby did not seem to remember the reproofs with which old Antoine had favoured him. When his master had taken his seat and held the reins in his hands, he jumped up lightly into his place, crossed his arms, and threw himself back with his usual ease.

The gate being open, the horse started off at full speed, and three minutes later the viscount's Irish trotter was going rapidly along the wide avenue of the Champs Elysées. It was a magnificent winter day, and numerous pedestrians who were walking about the gay thoroughfare turned to look at the fleet horse. The men admired the animal's action, the simple elegance of the harness, and the lightness of the carriage, while the women cast an approving glance at the handsome gentleman who drove so skilfully. Every one believed him to be one of fortune's favourites, and many indeed looked with an envious eye upon him.

Nevertheless, the young nobleman was at that moment suffering the most cruel torture. His thoughts were with the young girl he loved, and he trembled for her. What would become of Jeanne, if her brother did not return, and if implacable persecutors should succeed in dishonouring the name of Mensignac? Sartilly knew Jeanne's high sense of honour, and he feared that now that she was alone and without a fortune she might refuse to be his. When she had chosen him she had been rich and sought after, and she might think it unworthy of her to plight her troth having now fallen from her high estate. Besides, was it certain that the enemies who dealt such terrible blows in the dark would content themselves with one victim? Who knew but what the invisible plotter might in turn entrap Jeanne de Mensignac, the last of her race?

"I will save her, or die with her," thought the viscount at the moment his tilbury stopped at her house.

He knew that Jeanne expected him, since she had written for him to come, so he went straight to the small boudoir which she usually occupied. On entering it he felt rather surprised at not finding her alone. The English governess was seated on the other side of the work-table busy with some embroidery, and she would necessarily be present at the interview. Her presence was undoubtedly conformable to the rules of etiquette, for Sartilly knew very well that worldly decorum required that he should not have a long tête-à-tête with Jeanne; still, under such serious circumstances, he would have greatly preferred a conversation without witnesses. Besides, he had very little sympathy for Miss Georgiua Fassitt. She had certainly brought up Jeanne with unquestionable devotion, showing upon all occasions an attachment that seemed thoroughly sincere, and yet, somehow or

other, Sartilly instinctively mistrusted her. And rightly or wrongly imagining that she was opposed to his marriage, her presence, in his frame of mind, proved exceedingly annoying to him. However, he suspected that Jeanne had an object in having her present with them during a conversation which might perhaps decide their future life; though on the other hand, the young girl had certainly accustomed him to a freer intercourse, and only the day before she had met him alone in the library. As the crisis was still serious enough to justify a momentary infraction of social rules, the viscount was astonished at the scruples so suddenly shown by his betrothed.

When he accosted her, his manner was therefore rather more reserved than usual, but the welcome she gave him speedily eased his mind, for she offered him her hand with so much cordiality, and her large eyes expressed such sincerity, that Sartilly reproached himself for having doubted her for a single moment.

"I have been expecting you impatiently, Edmond," said Mademoiselle de Mensignac, "and I thank you for having come."

"You could not doubt my eagerness to do so," answered Edmond, surprised at the ceremonious style she adopted in speaking.

"I begged Miss Georgina to listen to what I have to say to you," continued Jeanne, in a voice which she tried to render calm; "you know how much I am attached to her, and now that I am alone in the world I need her advice more than ever."

Sartilly bowed and turned pale, in spite of the efforts he made to hide his agitation. Jeanne's words were a blow to his heart.

"However, two women, without protection and experience," continued Jeanne, "cannot act by themselves, and I depend upon you to help us."

"Alone in the world, did you say, Jeanne?" cried the viscount, with a burst of indignation. "Alone in the world! you, Jeanne—you, whom I love with all the strength of my heart, and when my most ardent desire is to be your husband!"

Mademoiselle de Mensignac's features expressed great emotion, and she remained for a moment without answering. It could be seen that she was struggling against the love which had taken complete possession of her heart, and that a predetermined resolution alone prevented her expressing her feelings. "God is my witness, Edmond," she finally said, in a trembling voice, "that I should have been proud and happy to be your wife, when I was able to bring you a name without a stain, and—a fortune."

She had hesitated before pronouncing the last word, which made Sartilly start.

"A fortune!" said he, bitterly; "what! do you, Jeanne, connect our love with pecuniary considerations?"

"Forgive me, Edmond," continued the girl; "a day will come, I trust, when I shall be able to say to you: 'Edmond, do you wish me to be your wife?' But for the present, I entreat you to leave me mistress of myself."

"Then you withdraw your promise?" repeated Sartilly, who felt tears coming into his eyes.

"You do not understand me, Edmond," said Jeanne sadly, "and yet you know very well that I love you."

These simple words, and this frank avowal, touched the viscount deeply. He took Jeanne's hand, and with a look full of tenderness and love, he said, "I will wait."

"Thank you, Edmond," rejoined the young girl, "and now it is your advice I require."

"Tell me what I can do for you," said Sartilly, eagerly.

"I want to sell this house, and realise the proceeds of the sale as soon as possible. Being absolutely ignorant of business matters, I depend upon you to point out what steps I ought to take."

"Sell this house!"

"It must be done, Edmond. The notary told you that I have no other fortune, and I wish to pay my brother's debt."

"Roger owes nothing—I am sure of it; and that scamp De Noreff will not dare to prosecute you."

"He is already doing so," rejoined the young girl, pointing out a paper lying upon the table.

"This is too insolent," murmured the viscount, looking with disgust at a yellowish sheet of paper bearing an official stamp.

"But this is addressed to Roger," said he, after reading the document; "it is only addressed to him, and——"

Jeanne stopped her lover with a gesture. "What would you do, Edmond, if Roger were your brother?"

Sartilly cast down his eyes and did not answer.

"You see very well that I cannot hesitate," calmly resumed Made-moiselle de Mensignac.

"And what proof have you that Roger is dead?" asked the viscount.

He expected to see the young girl shake her head sadly, but she looked at him steadily, and said, in a firm voice: "I no longer think that he is dead."

Sartilly's face expressed utter astonishment, and Jeanne suspected that he thought her mind was wandering. "If he is living," she continued, "my duty remains the same; it is I alone who can now prevent his name from being dishonoured, and struggle against the enemies who are compelling him to hide himself. My resolution is taken, Edmond, and I ask you, by the friendship that unites you to him, and by your love for me, to help me in performing my duty. I have asked the notary to come here to-morrow, and I rely upon your presence at my interview with him."

Sartilly was no longer listening to Jeanne—the words she had previously spoken occupied his thoughts, and he wondered if she had any good reason to believe in Roger's existence, or if her excited imagination had not deceived her with some delusive fancy. He looked at her anxiously, and almost feared to question her. "Why do you think that Roger is not dead?" he at last asked, timidly.

Jeanne turned pale and hesitated, but finally, in a low tremulous voice, she answered: "I saw my brother last night."

"Roger! you saw Roger!" cried Sartilly.

The young girl looked at her lover with an expression of undefinable grief, and did not answer. "Speak, Jeanne, I entreat you," exclaimed the distracted viscount.

She was making a great effort, and was going to speak, when Miss Georgina, who had so far not taken any part in the conversation, rose up, took hold of the young girl's hand, and said, in the most affectionate manner: "Jeanne, my dear child, I beg of you to forget those dangerous fancies; you are ill, and the recollection of a mournful dream can only aggravate your condition."

"Let me speak to him," said the young girl, gently, and she turned to Sartilly, who, pale with emotion, was eager to hear her story. "It was at the same hour as on the night before last," she resumed; "I was not in bed, as I could not sleep, but I was walking up and down my room, for I felt feverish, my forehead burned, and I leant it against the window opposite the left wing of the house. Suddenly I saw a light shining—it was an isolated light, and so faint that at first I thought it was the reflection of the moonlight on the slate roof. I looked more attentively, however, and I saw that this dim light came from the library, which seemed to me very strange, as who could be there at that hour? I attributed it at first to some neglect of the servants, but I soon remembered that no one could go into that part of the house, as I had had the key of the gallery taken away, and the private door of the staircase that leads down into the garden is always locked. Well, I still had before my eyes the dreadful visions of the night before, and I was already beginning to feel frightened, when suddenly a dark shadow passed the lighted window, and it seemed to me that this shadow stopped and leant its forehead against the window just as I was doing. By degrees the outline became more distinct, the figure became plainer, and it seemed to be looking at me. I uttered a loud cry, for I had recognised Roger, or rather I had divined that it was he, as I could only distinguish the outline of his profile. At the same moment the light was extinguished, and I saw nothing more, for I fainted away. When I came to myself, Miss Georgina was applying salts to restore me. The noise of my fall woke her up, and she came and remained with me until daybreak."

A long silence followed Jeanne's narrative. Edmond gave her a look full of love and pity, for he again trembled for her reason. The Englishwoman held the young girl's hands in her own, and, with her eyes, she supplicated Sartilly not to dwell upon this subject. He himself realised the danger of prolonging such a conversation, as Jeanne was in a state of excessive nervous excitement, and yet an instinctive feeling made him think that her vision had been real and not a dream. Thus it required a violent effort on his part to break off this conversation so full of peril, and revert to worrying business matters.

"Jeanne," he said, in a serious and impressive tone, "you have just expressed your wishes to me. You know that I hold them sacred, and although you refuse me the legal right of protecting you, I accept the part you offer me. I will be your friend and defender until the day when I become your husband; and now, tell me at what hour do you expect the notary to-morrow?"

"I wrote this morning to Maître Calmet to tell him to come here to-morrow at twelve o'clock, and I shall expect you to be here at that hour."

"I will be punctual," answered Sartilly, whose face suddenly brightened as if he had found the solution of a long-studied problem. "Will you now allow me to write a few urgent letters, and at the same time to look in the library for an indispensable document which I left there the last time I saw—that I saw Roger?" He had hesitated to pronounce his friend's name, and Jeanne had started on hearing it.

"My dear Georgina," she said, "will you give the key to Monsieur de Sartilly?"

The Englishwoman left the room but speedily returned with the key, which she handed to Edmond without saying a word. She was very seldom courteous in her manner towards him, and to-day her stiff coldness

struck him more than usual ; however, his other pre-occupations were too engrossing to let this make much impression upon him. He bade Jeanne an affectionate good-bye, bowed ceremoniously to Miss Georgina, and then by a way well known to him proceeded to the library.

As he walked along the gallery that led to the right wing of the house, he thought of the strange story he had just heard, and he could not help feeling a secret agitation. It was vain for him to remember that he was a man, and that the foolish terrors of a young girl had alone produced these impossible visions. It was in vain that he recalled to himself that he was brave—his heart beat more quickly, and the blood rushed to his temples, for in the presence of invisible peril bravery could avail him nothing, and his well-balanced mind began to waver as he weighed the cruel realities and the fantastic fears that Jeanne's narrative had given birth to. An instinct stronger than reason led him to indulge in improbable suppositions, and even at this moment he was going into the library to try to find some explanation of the dark enigma, as the forgotten document had only been a pretext to secure admission into the apartment.

The high oaken door was before him, and he almost hesitated to open it. However, recovering himself, he went in hastily. Night was coming on, and the room was growing dim—the subdued light giving an air of life to the large family portraits, which seemed to him as if they would step out of their carved frames ; the lofty bookcases cast enormous shadows around, and some antique tapestry at the end of the room seemed to have acquired a reddish tint.

Sartilly walked on warily, as if fearing to awaken an echo ; his brain was full of terrible phantoms, and mournful visions of the night before stood up distinctly before him.

There, by that ebony table inlaid with brasswork, he had for the last time held intimate communion with Roger ; further on, in those cosy arm-chairs, upholstered with Cordova leather, he had so often lounged, carrying on a pleasant chit-chat with Jeanne and her brother. The flowers that he had sent to Jeanne a couple of days before were still blooming in some large china vases on white marble pedestals.

All at once he stopped, seized by a feeling of repulsion, almost of fear, for at that very spot, on the night before, he had picked up the tress of golden hair, and he looked around him as if seeking for other proofs.

A last gleam from the setting sun, fast disappearing behind the hills of Meudon, lighted up a dark-coloured carpet, here spread over a part of the parquetry ; and a ray of bright light, coming through the lower part of the high and narrow window, darted to the end of the library.

Sartilly, motionless and thoughtful, followed with an absent eye this clear ray of sunshine, which appeared still more brilliant when contrasted with the corners of the room now deep in shade, and very soon his glance turned to a stain on the carpet, which the bright light brought out distinctly. It was a long, irregular stain—or, more correctly, a trail. It occurred to Sartilly that it was a trail of blood, and at that thought he started back. And yet he could not take his eyes off the stain. It fascinated him ; he examined it with dread, and yet stepped forward, urged on by curiosity which overpowered disgust. It stretched towards the end of the room ; and near the wall at the foot of the old tapestry hangings, on which knights in armour were courting ladies brave with jewels and coronets, it spread out and then suddenly ceased.

Sartilly stooped down, and had the courage to examine the tapestry,



discovering here and there some dark spots, as if drops of blood had spirted upon it. "It is here they killed her," he murmured.

Then he slowly rose up and remained standing before the wall, which he scrutinised with a look of horror in his eyes; and after a moment's stupor, he touched the tarnished tapestry, for it seemed to him that it must conceal some dark secret or terrible mystery—perhaps a trap; but no, he only felt the somewhat roughish surface of the embroidered fabric. Beyond the tapestry there was nothing but a wall—the building ended there—rising above the waste ground of the Trocadéro, and Sartilly despaired of ever discovering the secret.

The ray of sunshine suddenly disappearing, and the shades of night quickly falling, the room was soon left in darkness. Then Sartilly turned his back upon the bloody hanging, for a new feeling had just filled his heart—fear; and as he walked along with stealthy steps, he suffered from a nervous contraction which he had never known before, and on reaching the wide staircase, and seeing the bright lamps of his tilbury, and Toby waiting for him at the horse's head, he muttered to himself in a low voice: "Yes, I felt afraid—afraid!"

## VI.

### THE GREY ENVELOPE.

WHEN the tilbury had gone at a fast pace down the long Rue de Chaillot, and had reached the Champs Elysées, where Sartilly once more found himself amid the gay stir of Paris, his ideas took another course. The brightly-lighted cafés, the moving carriage lamps gleaming along the wide avenue, the hum of life, all chased away even the remembrance of that moment of terror, just as the sun dispels nocturnal visions. All that Edmond remembered of his visit to the Mensignac mansion was his firmly fixed resolution to save Jeanne's fortune in spite of Jeanne herself.

"She won't marry me because I am well off, and she is about to become poor," he thought. "Ah, well, I will reverse our parts," and with that rapidity of conception which almost always becomes developed after a crisis, he built up a plan in his mind—a plan which was very simple, as it was merely to prevent Mademoiselle de Mensignac from selling her house to pay her brother's debts. In lieu of that he, Sartilly, intended to save the honour of the name of Mensignac by paying Monsieur de Noreff out of his own pocket. However, the execution of this scheme presented numerous difficulties. To find five hundred thousand francs was not impossible, for Sartilly was rich, and had good credit as a landowner, so that it was merely a question of time; but then, time was of the greatest importance in Jeanne's present situation, and if the money was to be paid at all, it must be paid quickly.

Prudence, also, was indispensable; as by borrowing a large sum like this from a banker the secret of his intervention would become known, and Sartilly wished to avoid this above everything. Moreover, if he mortgaged his property through the intervention of a Paris notary, the inconvenience would be nearly the same. The only course by which he might avoid gossip was to try and borrow the sum in Normandy, where he had extensive landed property, or to quietly sell a small estate he owned in the department of La Manche; however, as in the provinces nothing is

ever managed quickly, Sartilly feared that he might realise the proceeds of sale or mortgage just too late.

Moreover, there was another point still more embarrassing, for even if the money were ready before the sale of the Mensignac mansion, how could Sartilly induce Jeanne to accept it, for she had spoken with so much energy that the viscount despaired of overcoming her resolution.

As he was turning the corner of the Rue d'Astorg, his horse nearly knocked down a passer-by, who avoided the collision by a bound on one side, and disappeared almost immediately. It seemed to Sartilly, whose mind was full of odd stories and impossible adventures, that this man, although very shabbily dressed, looked somewhat like Roger de Mensignac. He dismissed this ridiculous supposition immediately, and yet by a natural chain of ideas this incidental meeting reminded him of the conversation that he had had with Jeanne.

The young girl now believed that her brother was alive, and although the viscount felt convinced that she was deceived, he had not tried to deprive her of this last illusion. However, while reflecting anent all the late singular coincidences, he was suddenly struck with an idea, which he believed to be a providential inspiration.

"I have found a plan," he said, in a low voice, throwing the reins to Toby as soon as his tilbury stopped before the house, and thereupon he hastened upstairs, locked himself in his room, threw himself in an arm-chair, and began to arrange this new plan which chance had just suggested to him. As Jeanne believed in Roger's existence, she could also be made to believe that he had come to her help from his unknown retreat. To prevail upon her to accept the five hundred thousand francs, Sartilly only had to let her imagine that the money came from her brother. This harmless deception would be accepted the more easily, he thought, as Roger's mysterious absences were frequent. It might even be hoped that society would be deceived, and his, Sartilly's, intervention not even suspected, for the members of the aristocratic club to which Mensignac belonged were accustomed to see him periodically disappear and unexpectedly return without his conduct causing aught save a few jesting remarks.

The plan was, therefore, an excellent one, providing due speed was employed. The viscount must hasten the sale of his own property, and retard that of the Mensignac mansion. By taking the notary into his confidence, and inducing him to act with him, he would be able to find a means of delaying the sale of the house, and besides, it is always easier to impede affairs than to hasten them. On this score, accordingly, there was very little to fear, and as for his domains in Normandy, the viscount knew that he would have no trouble in getting rid of them in a country where every one aspires to become a landowner.

The point remained of finding a pretext to induce Mademoiselle de Mensignac to accept the money. An anonymous present of bank-notes would certainly excite her mistrust and offend her delicacy. The money must be brought by a messenger, or Roger's handwriting must be imitated, which course Sartilly hardly liked to follow; and yet he could devise no other way of deceiving Jeanne.

Finally, however, he thought he had found an expedient. He had received a good many letters from Roger, some of which had been burnt while others had been preserved, and in searching his drawers he might by chance find something to help him. For instance, one of the letters might deal with money matters, and in fact Sartilly remembered that he

had once received back from his friend a small sum lent at the card-table, and it struck him that the expressions used by Mensignac in the letter in which he had enclosed this money might prove suited to the present situation. Notes of this description are usually very vaguely worded, and it often happens that the precise sum enclosed is not specified.

It was assuredly a very faint hope, still it was a hope, and the viscount, who had no choice of means, was not disposed to neglect the chance. He went at once to an old buhl secretary, in which he usually kept his letters, and as he seldom examined the drawers he was frightened upon opening them to see what a quantity of papers he had accumulated. He realised that he would have a deal of trouble in searching through such a confused mass of notes and documents of all kinds. Order was not his predominant quality, and he had the bad habit of preserving his correspondence unsorted, so that the drawers contained all sorts of writings—deeds and leases being mingled with love letters and youthful attempts at versification.

Although a little dismayed at the work he would have to accomplish, he bravely began examining all these papers, looking at them one by one, and rejecting all that were not in Roger's handwriting. With some little trouble he succeeded in finding several notes from his friend—all of them very short, for meeting almost daily they did not need to indulge in lengthy correspondence. Unfortunately none of these missives answered Sartilly's purpose, and he soon became convinced that the search he had undertaken would lead to no satisfactory result.

There remained but one drawer unsearched, and he remembered that it was the one in which he had formerly locked up his most important papers, so it was very improbable that he would find any commonplace letters there. However, not to neglect any chance, he opened this drawer and drew from it, with a careless air, some old love letters, tied together with faded ribbons, and several family documents, including a musty parchment relating to a debt contracted by one of his ancestors before starting on the second crusade. He was about to close the drawer again, when suddenly he caught sight of a large grey envelope, secured with several black seals, and bearing the words in Roger's handwriting: "To my friend Edmond; to be opened after my death."

The viscount's first feeling was surprise, but he soon remembered that Roger had confided this envelope to him five years previously, and he had almost completely forgotten it—first, because he seldom opened that drawer, and also because he had never taken the words, "To be opened after my death," in serious consideration. This solemn injunction had seemed so little in accordance with his friend's age and spirits, that he had looked upon it rather as a passing fancy; and besides, the circumstances under which Roger had handed him this mysterious letter were not calculated to induce Sartilly to attach any great importance to its contents.

He now remembered everything perfectly well. It was after a gay supper. Roger was present, and the party, after successively chatting about English horses, Bordeaux claret, and women of fashion—those inexhaustible subjects of conversation at clubs—had by chance touched on a more serious matter. One of them had mentioned the sudden death of a foreigner, whom every one had believed to be very wealthy, and yet he had left absolutely nothing behind him, and his wife and children had suddenly fallen from opulence into the most complete destitution. All searches had been vain; no money or property of any kind had been

found, although the deceased had inhabited Paris for thirty years, and was supposed to have possessed a considerable fortune. This odd event was commented upon in a thousand different ways, each person giving his own explanation of it, and the majority opining that the foreigner had lived on some annuity, or by some secret employment that had naturally ended with his life. However, Roger de Mensignac was not of that mind, and Sartilly now remembered what he had said. "There are cases," he had remarked, "when a man may have an interest in hiding his fortune, but, in such a case, precaution ought to be taken against apoplexy, and your foreigner, Sir John Farnham, must have been a fool."

The party broke up soon afterwards, and the two friends left the club together on foot, each smoking a cigar. On reaching the corner of the Rue d'Astorg, Roger shook hands with Sartilly, and then gave him a packet, quietly saying, "Keep this until I ask you to return it to me," and thereupon he had started off in the direction of the Champs Elysées.

The viscount had only read the superscription on the envelope at the moment when he was going to bed, and he was rather astonished by this unexpected deposit; but as he expected to see his friend the next day and ask him what was the meaning of this packet, he threw it into the drawer without letting himself be frightened. However, on the next day, as often happened, the marquis left Paris without saying where he was going, and so Sartilly was unable to question him. Roger's absence lasted a month on this occasion, and when he returned to Paris, Edmond had gone to Baden. Then the viscount, on his return from Germany, failed to meet the marquis in Paris; for it happened to be the opening of the shooting season, and Monsieur de Mensignac had been invited to some grand battues in Germany. Thus, by a series of mischances, the summer and part of the autumn passed by without the two friends meeting, and when the season for returning to Paris arrived, Sartilly, naturally thoughtless, had completely forgotten the deposit. He did not speak of it to Mensignac, the latter never alluded to it, and so the package remained unheeded in the drawer.

Now, however, the viscount's search had resulted in a discovery which at such a moment was bound to be of immense importance. His friend must have been looking forward for a long time to some impending misfortune, and had doubtless wished to provide against it. He had not cared to die like that foreigner spoken of at the supper party without leaving any trace of his belongings. The great secret was probably there within that large grey envelope, sealed in black with the Mensignac arms, and Sartilly, holding the mysterious package, again read the disquieting superscription, feeling a kind of superstitious fear, and, in spite of his ardent desire to know its contents, lacking the courage to open it. Chance had sent him the explanation so ardently longed for, the explanation of Roger's mysterious disappearance, and yet instead of hastening to acquaint himself with it, he lingered willingly amid his conjectures. What was he going to learn? What revelations had Mensignac enclosed in that envelope which could so easily be unsealed? His troubled imagination called forth a thousand chimeras, and he foresaw discoveries still stranger than the reality—strange as the latter was already—his memory recalling a variety of circumstances in the life of his friend, to which recent events gave a serious signification.

He felt sure that the time when Roger had confided this package to him had coincided with the time of his first payment to Monsieur de Noreff, for,

Maitre Calmet, the notary, had declared that five years previously the marquis had paid the odious foreigner the sum of four hundred thousand francs, borrowed during the preceding year. Sartilly did not know the precise day of the payment, but he could learn it from the notary; and as for the supper, he remembered that it had taken place in 1842, towards the end of April. If the two dates coincided, it might be supposed that the forewarning of misfortune had come to Roger after some pecuniary affair with Monsieur de Noreff. It was also after that period that the marquis's absences had become more frequent, and of longer duration. Everything concurred, then, in bringing the crime home to that man Noreff, who was so bitterly persecuting the Mensignac family, and would soon perhaps attack Jeanne, the only one of the name now left. The thought of the danger to which she was exposed gave Sartilly the courage to proceed with his investigation.

"The means of saving her are contained in this letter," he murmured, making a movement to break the seals. The wax was already cracking under his fingers, when he let the envelope fall with a gesture of discouragement, and the idea which should have struck him before all others now came to him, and once more he perused the superscription, "After my death." Thus had Roger written.

And Roger—was he really dead? In all probability he was, but it was not certain; and if he were living, had he, Sartilly, the right to pry into his secrets by opening that envelope? At this thought the viscount was seized with cruel doubts, and relapsed into his former hesitation. If he had been sure that the letter only contained a will, or some instructions relative to Roger's fortune, Jeanne's interest would have quickly overcome all other considerations. Some information, an indication, a note from her brother, might save the young girl from ruin, and the name of Mensignac from dishonour. It was very probable that Sartilly would find that the grey envelope contained some conclusive document, perhaps an explanation of the singular manner in which the marquis had managed his affairs. But what was the secret the packet contained? Might not Roger have had serious motives for hiding it. Sartilly reflected that there are sometimes sad family matters or personal transgressions which one is loath to confide to anybody for fear of having to blush; and Roger's life had been mysterious enough to authorise a supposition of the kind.

And if Jeanne were right, and if her brother were still living and came back to demand this package, how could the viscount then dare to reply, "I thought you were dead, and obeying your instructions, broke the seal of the package left in my care?" The thought of exposing himself to such shame made the blood rise to Sartilly's face, and he remained for a long time motionless, resting his head on his hands with a weary, depressed look, like a man who has just passed through a violent struggle. The worst of all sufferings of the mind, uncertainty, overwhelmed him, and he no longer had even the energy to throw the letter back into the drawer, to lock up the secretary, and drive away the temptation that beset him. Instead of coming to a decision his mind reverted to his love for Jeanne and the danger she was exposed to; then the scenes of the previous day came back to his mind—the severed head, the chief of the detective police and the agent Jottrat. All the entangled horrors and mysteries seized hold of him like a nightmare, and in the midst of the odious visions the detestable face of De Noreff rose up before him. His torpor then gave place to ferocious hate, and suddenly rising to his feet he

began walking hastily about the room, murmuring disconnected words and clenching his fists as if anxious to fight an invisible enemy.

"The miserable scamp!" he muttered; "it was he who cut that woman's throat, and he is the cause of Roger's disappearance. I, allowing myself to be deceived by a miserable piece of jugglery, left his house without strangling him. Yes, I went away, simply because he showed me one of his accomplices who resembled his victim. Now, however, I must wait until Jottrat prepares his traps to unmask him."

Suddenly he bounded towards the secretary, seized the letter, and broke the seals. The wax crumbled under his fingers, and the torn envelope disclosed papers of different colours. There was, first, a package of letters written on pink and blue tinted paper, and held together by a narrow silken ribbon. There could be no mistaking their character. They were undoubtedly love letters; and Sartilly, surprised at this unexpected discovery, hesitated to open the packet, when on the back of it he read in Roger's handwriting these words: "To be burnt after my death."

That certainly was an order, and if the envelope contained nothing else than these missives, the viscount's indiscretion would answer no purpose. Great as was his desire to learn his friend's secrets, he could not think of disobeying such a formal injunction. Besides, a woman's letters are sacred, no matter who the woman may be. Sartilly took up the packet of letters, and placed it in a drawer out of his sight, to avoid temptation. His curiosity had so justifiable a motive that the precaution he thus took against himself was quite natural, and his discretion was immediately rewarded, for he found that the envelope also contained a paper in his friend's handwriting, a paper addressed to himself. On making this discovery his heart began to beat more quickly, and his eyesight became so dim from agitation that at first he could scarcely read the missive; however, making a great effort, he began the perusal and read as follows:—

"My dear Edmond,—I beg you to excuse the rather solemn requests I am obliged to make to you; however, while drawing up what I must call my last will, I hope that you will not have to execute it, for the embarrassment in which I am now placed will be at an end in five years' time, and I hope to live as long as that. But, whatever may happen, this is my actual situation. I am neither a coiner nor a conspirator; and yet I am obliged to take precautions not usual with honest people. The moment has not arrived for explaining the cause of all these mysteries; but I will explain them to you some day when we are sitting together smoking some of those excellent cigars that our friend Vegas brought me last year from Havana.

"In the meantime, this is what I have to tell you, and to ask of you. For reasons that you will know later on I have been obliged to sell all my property, and I possess nothing *under the sun*, as they say in Normandy; nor have I any income derived from government funds. But do not be alarmed; my inheritance from my father is intact, and I have even increased it. I have only secreted it so that it may be safe from the clutches of certain people. The means I have adopted are sure ones, and as long as I live there is nothing to be feared. However, I may die, and in that case I shall need your aid. I do not wish Jeanne to suffer on account of my misfortunes, and so I entrust to you the care of restoring to her, unimpaired, the fortune of our house. Accordingly, if I die before reclaiming this package, this is what you must do.

"No doubt, my dear Edmond, you will laugh, as the instructions I am going to give you would not be out of place in a drama; but I have reasons to be distrustful, and can leave nothing to chance. As soon as you have read my letter, pray go to my house, and open, in the library, the carved oaken bookcase that I won one day from you at Chantilly. You will remember your bet against Seymour's horse, and you will easily recognise the piece of furniture that was so long in your room. You are the only person who would be able to distinguish it from the others, as I took care to have six made of much the same pattern.

"Now, as you are well aware, this bookcase is opened by secret means, and as soon as you have pressed the spring which you know about you will see a score of volumes on the upper shelf. Open the seventh one, beginning at the left, and at the nineteenth line of page 119 of that book you will see a sentence you must read with attention—that's all.

"I seem to hear you say that I must be crazy, but I swear to you that nothing can be more serious. After reading the seven or eight lines I have mentioned you will understand everything, and will act accordingly.

"You must go alone—alone; do you understand me? You must go alone to save Jeanne's fortune; hand it to her on your return, showing her this letter, and I can say this to you, as I shall be no longer living when you read these lines, I sincerely hope that you will marry her.

"Good-bye, my old friend, and once more forgive me for troubling you with these mysterious and annoying commissions.

"ROGER DE MENSIGNAC."

The signature was written in as bold a hand as the letter, but in penning the postscript that followed Roger seemed to have trembled.

"Burn the letters herewith enclosed without reading them, and promise me never to try to discover the person who wrote them."

Sartilly remained motionless, absorbed in his reflections, but without a single clear idea. Roger's letter had fully confirmed all his apprehensions, but he had hoped to find more precise information in the grey envelope, and in place of the revelations he had expected he had only read some directions for finding a hidden fortune. Not a word of the adversaries who pursued their dark schemes in the background; no information that could put him on their track; not only Noreff's name was not mentioned, but there was nothing that could connect the odious foreigner with the perils which the marquis alluded to; nothing, excepting perhaps the coincidence of the time fixed by Roger with the terrible events that had taken place two nights before.

Monsieur de Mensignac declared that in five years he would be delivered from the enemies who were powerful enough to oblige him to hide his fortune. In five years he would have nothing more to fear, but be able to renounce precautions and a life of mystery and concealment. Now five years were just over, and Roger had suddenly disappeared. The strange coincidence struck Sartilly, and made him concentrate all the faculties of his mind on this point. The work he became absorbed in resembled the researches of those scientific men who, from an isolated fragment, try to reconstruct an animal belonging to an extinct race.

The term assigned by Mensignac must have rested on precise material facts, and if he had asserted that at a fixed time he would be free and at ease, it was assuredly because at that same date he expected to have

discharged some contracted obligation. Now, two days before, Monsieur de Noreff had claimed payment of that enormous loan of five hundred thousand francs of which no one could explain the origin, and Roger, who had told the notary a few hours before to come and receive the sum, could no longer be found.

The conclusion of this might easily be drawn, and Sartilly gradually began to feel enlightened as to the gloomy episodes of those two days—the very last of the stated term of five years. The unknown enemy had rid himself of Roger on the day when his power over the Mensignac family was to have ceased; after having despoiled the marquis he had killed him.

Roger had not anticipated so much villany, firmly believing that when five years had elapsed he would be free, expecting then, no doubt, that in exchange for a last payment, he would recover some proofs that Noreff had held against him for years; and so, that he might not part with these proofs, whatever they were and whatever they concerned, the murderer had killed his victim.

Sartilly now thought he had sufficiently penetrated one side of the mystery, and he felt more strongly armed against the scamp he had to fight. Nevertheless, nothing explained the part that the woman with the golden hair had played in this gloomy story. By what link was she connected with the disappearance of Roger, and how was he to reach the perpetrator of these two crimes?

The love letters might explain the enigma, but to read them in spite of Roger's prohibition would have been real felony, such as the viscount was incapable of committing. However, he determined not to burn them until he was quite certain that Roger was dead.

"Perhaps the poor fellow is still alive," he thought, "and if he should come to ask me for those letters I must be able to produce them."

So he placed the package at the bottom of the drawer, carefully locked the secretary, and secreted Roger's note in his pocket-book. Then his ideas turning to Roger's request, he was surprised at its oddity. He perfectly well remembered the bookcase in question, and the bet by which he had lost it, and had no doubt but what he would be able to recognise it among the six other similar ones. However, a search at this moment in the gloomy gallery, where he had just experienced involuntary terror, inspired him with a secret repugnance, and nothing would have induced him to return there that evening, for his nerves had not sufficiently recovered from the shock they had been subjected to. To brave the solitude of the library, he would wait for bright daylight to chase away the visions of his excited brain, and strengthen his reason. Besides, he felt a real need of change and rest, and so he decided to dine at his club, and rang for his valet to dress him.

The more serious the circumstances and the more complicated the situation became, the more need he had of all his composure and sagacity; and these two qualities being weakened, as all others are, by a long strain on the brain, Sartilly began to feel bewildered in this maze of conflicting facts and contradictory surmises.

He remembered that in his youth he had often, while walking out-of-doors, found the solution of a problem to which he had uselessly devoted long hours of study, and he concluded that an evening spent at the card-table and in pleasant chat would be favourable to his plans. Moreover, he hoped above all to escape for the night from the mournful thoughts that had distressed him during the last two days; to forget all about severed



heads, police-agents, money affairs, and again resume the pleasant life of a man of leisure.

He therefore repaired to his club with the determination of dining as cheerfully as he could, and of mingling in all the gay conversation in order to realise his desire of diverting his thought from annoying subjects, but he still had some efforts to make, for it is rather difficult to reason one's self into enjoyment, and to laugh from necessity. He depended, however, a great deal upon meeting pleasant companions, and a little, it must be acknowledged, upon the excellent wines of the club. In going up the staircase, he energetically shook off his sadness, and succeeded in recovering at least a semblance of his old gay manner, which he had rather lost.

His entrance into the spacious red room was greeted with joyous acclamations, for he was very much liked at the club, where the members appreciated his ready wit and courteous manners. He had very rarely been among them during the winter, and they knew that his approaching marriage would make him renounce club life almost for good, so he was warmly welcomed.

While in the midst of this elegant circle, and listening to the amusing conversation around him, his mind recovered its strength and serenity. After numerous and cordial greetings with his friends, he seated himself in a favourite corner of the room, throwing himself at once into the full current of the chit-chat going on. The subjects that were being discussed admirably suited a man who wished above all things to be gay, for the members were talking of the two last scandals in which the opera ballet corps was concerned, and anecdotes followed upon each other without interruption. It was really a brisk fire of jokes, and Sartilly, though a little behindhand in the affairs of the day, remembered them sufficiently well to be as quick as usual with brilliant repartees. However, unfortunately, he had not thought of a transition, which might have been easily foreseen, and which brought the conversation to another subject. From the ballet girls to the last opera ball there was no great distance, and amid a spicy anecdote some one suddenly called out: "Oh, all that is nothing in comparison with the adventure of the lady with the golden hair."

This unfortunate remark gave Sartilly a blow in the heart, and dispelled all his gaiety. Raising his hands to his forehead to hide his pallor, he made an instinctive movement to leave. A fatality seemed to follow him, recalling wherever he went those horrible events which he so much wished to forget. However, perhaps nothing more would be said on this disagreeable subject, and so he decided to remain.

The person who had spoken the words which had alarmed the viscount was a young officer,—rather giddy and very talkative, and whose favourite amusement consisted in gleaning the news of the day in various circles of Parisian society. After his remark there came a general cry: "Let us know what it is! Eh! Châteaubrun, tell us about it."

Sartilly, rather anxious to learn what the public might think and know of the events in which he was personally so much interested, listened attentively to the captain's narrative. The latter, leaning back in his arm-chair, and taking two or three puffs at his cigar, began with the solemn air of a man sure of creating a sensation:

"I suppose you all know whom I am going to talk about?"

"Yes," replied two or three members, in chorus, "the veiled woman—Titian's picture—who drives every day in the Champs Elysées."

"Who *drove*," replied Châteaubrun, emphasising the verb. "for you

will never see her again, my dear friends; and as for you, Précey, it will no longer be worth your while to prance round about her carriage between four and six o'clock."

"And why, pray?" asked the gentleman appealed to, very coolly.

The captain jerked his head like an actor about to launch an effective phrase, and after a short pause replied: "Because her head was cut off on the night of the opera ball!"

This unexpected announcement was followed by a tempest of exclamations and derisive laughter, mingled with questions and jests.

"Was it in the papers that you found your news? or have you some friends in the police service?"

"Gentlemen," answered Châteaubrun, quietly, "I obtained my information elsewhere, but it is perfectly correct. The person who told me saw and touched the lady's head, and that head was completely separated from the body."

"The deuce!" said Monsieur de Précey; "this is all the more extraordinary, as this very afternoon I saw the lady in question going up the Champs Elysées in her carriage just as usual!"

"Which of you two is crazy?" asked one of the listeners.

Sartilly, on hearing Monsieur de Précey's remark, redoubled his attention. The strange resemblance between the two women had just been proved again.

"Gentlemen," resumed Châteaubrun, "when I have given you the name of my informant you will no longer doubt the accuracy of my information. My informant was Mademoiselle Coralie of the royal opera house."

"Ah! ah! She can be depended on," laughed Monsieur de Précey, and two or three others.

"Excuse me, she is famous for always speaking the truth."

This assertion occasioned a fresh outburst of hilarity.

"Besides," continued the captain, "she was not alone. Elise of the Variétés theatre was there; and there were also three gentlemen."

"Ah! ah! who were they?" asked his incredulous listeners.

"One was that Baron Polard who dresses his servants in such ridiculous liveries; the other a young Switzer whose name I have forgotten, and there was yet another——" The captain stopped short trying to recollect the name of the third person, and meanwhile Sartilly felt terribly embarrassed. "The other," resumed Châteaubrun, "the other?—let me see—ah! now I have it—the other, why he is here; it is our friend who has just risen from the dead this evening, our friend Sartilly!" and jumping up he took the arm of the viscount, whose vexation was extreme. "Why, dash it," resumed the captain, "as you were present why did you let me begin the story? You know it much better than I do, since you took part in the affair."

All eyes were now fixed on Sartilly, who, after having turned pale with emotion, was now crimson with anger, at being thus brought forward.

"Come, Sartilly, as you were present, tell us the truth," exclaimed the bystanders.

Great as was the viscount's irritation, he had sufficient command over himself to conceal it, and to answer calmly: "Châteaubrun and De Précey are both right; it is really true that a severed head has been found, but not that of the lady with the golden hair. There has simply been a great crime, and I am annoyed at having been mixed up by chance in such a

nasty affair, for I passed all day yesterday at the Prefecture of Police, which was not very diverting."

After this preamble, Sartilly briefly related the facts, taking care not to mention his friend Roger, and he now hoped that this insupportable conversation would be allowed to drop. Indeed his version had been accepted, and the talk was drifting into a different channel, when another person present made an unexpected remark: "I also know Mademoiselle Coralie," he said, with a very decided German accent, "and she gave me some particulars that Monsieur de Sartilly has forgotten."

The person who thus revived a nearly exhausted subject was a foreigner lately admitted to the club. His name was Monsieur de Dohna; he was a Prussian by birth, but naturalised in Russia, and said to be a large landholder in Courland. He was rather prepossessing in appearance, but his unctuous, exaggerated politeness had made him disliked by many members of the club. Sartilly, among others, could not bear him, and felt very much offended at his remark.

"Oh!" said he, disdainfully, "tastes differ, and if you prefer to believe Mademoiselle Coralie rather than me, you are welcome to do so."

Monsieur de Dohna, who was a tall fellow with light hair and a pale face, did not seem put out by this sneering remark, but leisurely resumed: "I was told that the Marquis de Mensignac was noticed at the opera ball giving his arm to the woman who has been murdered, and that since leaving the ball with her he has never been seen."

"Yes, I heard that also," said the captain, "and, in fact, we haven't seen Mensignac for the last two days."

The viscount could contain himself no longer; on hearing Dohna thus publicly refer to Roger's inexplicable absence, he altogether lost his patience: "And what do Monsieur de Mensignac's actions matter to you?" he asked, with great haughtiness.

"Oh! they matter very little to me," said the pseudo-Russian, with the greatest indifference; "only it happens that he owes a friend of mine a large sum of money, and it will not be paid, as he has disappeared."

"You lie!" cried Sartilly, in a paroxysm of fury.

The foreigner did not even give a start of surprise on receiving this insult, and one might almost have thought that he had expected it, for, instead of answering in a passionate tone, he said to the viscount, in as steady a voice as if he had been repeating a lesson: "You have insulted me grossly, sir, and owe me reparation; two of my friends will call upon you to-morrow."

"I shall expect them," retorted Sartilly, furiously; and thereupon he darted out of the room.

## VII.

### THE ENGLISH TAVERN.

THE viscount left the club in a state of excitement difficult to describe; he seemed decidedly unfortunate, for all that he undertook turned against him; he had gone to the club with the firm intention of diverting his mind, but he left it furiously angry with all the members, as well as with himself; and, to make matters worse, he had got into a quarrel of the most unpleasant kind.

It was not the prospect of a duel that disquieted him so much ; but at that moment his interests required him to keep quiet. He knew that this affair would bring him before the public ; besides, it had an origin which the viscount dreaded to have known, connected as it was with Roger's disappearance. A duel on that account was the worst thing that could happen ; but, unfortunately, matters could not be remedied. Sartilly realised that his friend's absence imposed a heavy responsibility upon him, and that he had not the right to expose his life when there was so much at stake. However, it was now too late to think of that, and he saw no means of avoiding a hostile meeting. On the other hand, moreover, he was not sorry to fight with a friend of the odious Noreff, hoping thus to avenge himself in part, pending the day when he would be able to settle accounts with the real criminal ; and he even longed for the morrow to come to have the affair over.

In his anger he had completely forgotten that he had gone to his club to dine, and he had rushed half crazy on to the boulevard, walking straight along, without knowing where he was going. By force of habit he took the way to the Madeleine, which led to his home ; in fact, he knew the direction so well that he could have gone with his eyes shut to the Rue d'Astorg. But on that particular evening, preoccupied as he was, he passed the street where he resided without noticing it, and went onwards up the Faubourg Saint Honoré and the Faubourg du Roule, and thence to the Avenue des Ternes.

It was about eight o'clock ; the night was dark and cold ; a fine rain, mingled with small flakes of snow, was falling, and the few passers-by whom Sartilly saw were hurrying along, wrapped up in their great-coats. This part of Paris, now covered with handsome houses, was then a solitude—a succession of deserted and badly-paved streets, and so dimly lighted that after nightfall it was almost dangerous to venture about the neighbourhood, especially beyond the city gates.

Sartilly had already passed the gate, running rather than walking along, and without noticing anything that occurred around him. His senseless promenade might indeed have continued all the night, if he had not by chance found his way into a dark, badly-paved blind alley, which obliged him to retrace his steps.

This simple act requiring an effort of will, the viscount returned to consciousness. Forgetting for an instant his plans and the combinations that absorbed him, he began to wonder where he was, and why he had betaken himself to such lonely regions. After a moment's reflection, he understood that he had completely lost his way, and, at the same time, as his mind became clear again, physical wants asserted themselves, and he was obliged to acknowledge that he was extremely hungry. His first idea was to take a cab to return into Paris, but he looked round and listened in vain : he could not see any vehicle, nor did he hear the slightest rumble. It really seemed as if he were in some small village. As he felt horribly fatigued, rather than return, on foot and fasting, along the route he had just taken, he preferred trying to find in the neighbourhood some tavern where he might eat and rest himself, even if the place were a very common one.

After proceeding a hundred paces or so along the uneven road, he came to a rather broad avenue that seemed familiar to him, and at a short distance towards the left he discovered a lantern, the light of which he welcomed in his distress like a beacon of safety. He walked on without hesitation towards this lantern and found himself at a garden gate.

Fortune had been propitious, for the lantern gave sufficient light for him to read in large black letters on the garden wall the inscription "English Tavern," beneath which appeared the following pleasant notice for a hungry man: "Pale ale, porter, Irish whisky, York hams, roast beef."

This list of eatables and drinkables was an agreeable surprise to the viscount, who infinitely preferred an English establishment to one of the miserable cook shops which he had expected to find in this part of Paris. English taverns of this kind, now so common, were seldom met with at that period, and then only in special quarters. However, the proximity of the Champs Elysées and the Bois de Boulogne brought to the Ternes a number of grooms and English jockeys, which circumstance explained the presence of this establishment in a solitary avenue.

Sartilly hastily crossed the garden, and went into the tavern, which was screened by trees and built of wood in the style of a chalet. Although there certainly had not been much money spent in its construction, still a number of customers could be vaguely descried through the windows. As soon as Sartilly pushed the door open, however, he found himself in such a cloud of smoke that it was impossible for him to distinguish anything. Gradually his eyes became accustomed to the dimness, and then he perceived that the landlord of the establishment had followed the English fashion, even as regards his interior arrangements: the long room was divided into narrow compartments, separated by partitions seven or eight feet high; each box being furnished with a table and benches which could accommodate three or four persons, and communicating with the central passage. The isolation, so dear to Englishmen, was complete, and the customers could neither see their neighbours nor be seen by them.

Sartilly finding a compartment free, immediately entered it and ordered a slice of ham and a glass of ale, which were brought to him promptly, immediate payment being demanded according to the English fashion. He hastened to satisfy his appetite, doubly sharpened by his long walk; but in proportion as he recovered his strength, his anxieties, for an instant forgotten, returned to him, and he was puzzled to know how he could manage to meet the notary at Mademoiselle de Mensignac's and visit the mysterious bookcase, when he would probably have to arrange with his seconds about the conditions of his duel.

The sound of people talking in the neighbouring compartment at last roused him from his reflections, for although the occupants of the adjoining boxes were invisible, conversation could be freely heard from one to the other of them. The viscount would certainly not have paid attention to the talk of the people who occupied the next stall, had he not been struck by a singular peculiarity, as they alternately and even simultaneously spoke in three languages. English and French he understood very well, and he recognised the other language as German. It even seemed to him that he had heard the German voice before, and this idea made him listen more attentively. However, he determined to content himself with listening, for of recent times he had made so many mistakes that he put no great faith in his ideas. It was an odd dialogue: each of the speakers used his own language, and no doubt understood what the others said, since the talk did not flag for a moment. The result was that the viscount, who knew French and English, only understood two remarks out of three, and thus had some difficulty in catching the general sense. However, at the outset the commonplace remarks he heard failed to interest him;

but after a little while he caught some words that seemed to relate to his situation.

"You say, then, that he outwitted them all right?" muttered the person speaking in French.

"I should think so, indeed," was the reply in English.

At this point a long explanation was given by the German, and roars of laughter followed.

"Ah! the governor is a skilful fellow and no mistake," repeated the first two speakers at the same time.

"Yes, if we had not that cursed nobleman against us," replied the Englishman, "the money would be ours already, and the girl wouldn't be any longer in our way."

Then some German was spoken in a threatening voice, and finally the Frenchman said, laughingly: "You, old fellow, are angry with him because he played you such a famous trick—in the morning, you know. Well, you had good legs, certainly."

"We shall get rid of him very soon, you say," remarked the Englishman, after a short answer from the German. "Well, I ask nothing better; but in what way?"

Sartilly heard some more words which were perfectly incomprehensible to him; then nothing more; in fact it might have been supposed that his three neighbours had suddenly left the tavern. Extremely surprised, he wondered if a happy chance had not put him on the track of the criminals. A slight noise made him raise his head, and he thought he could distinguish, through the smoke that hovered over the box, a head looking at him from above the partition, and he rose up to take a nearer view. But, if indeed any one had been watching, the person had disappeared with such prodigious celerity that Sartilly thought he must have been deceived.

Had he been watched and recognised? Was that the cause of the profound silence that had followed upon the animated conversation? He was very much perplexed, and listened in vain. But no, nothing more could be heard. It might have been thought that the tavern was haunted by supernatural beings who slipped away, invisible, amid the clouds of tobacco smoke. Once or twice it seemed to him that shadowy forms flitted by, past the opening of his box; but at all events, silence still prevailed in the next compartment.

This uncertainty ended by irritating him so much that he decided upon imitating the manœuvres of his neighbours; and mounting upon his bench with great precautions, he looked over the partition into the stall so noisily occupied a few moments before. It was now empty. The disappearance of the men who had been talking furnished Sartilly with abundant food for reflection. Their sudden departure seemed to him like flight; and they must have had serious motives for interrupting their conversation in this manner, as people of their stamp, thought the viscount, do not relinquish the pleasure of spending an evening at a tavern out of caprice or fatigue; so if they had run away, it was from fear of being overheard. But, after all, their conversation had not been very compromising; so what could have been the reason for their sudden flight? At last, Sartilly remembering the head that had peered for a moment above the partition, understood it all. "They must have recognised me," he thought, "and were afraid of being recognised in return."

The logical conclusion of this reasoning was that the viscount had met these tavern drinkers before; but where and when? He fancied that he had

previously heard the voice of the person who had spoken in German, but he was quite unable to remember under what circumstances. Very much puzzled by this new mystery, Edmond resolved to clear up his doubts by calling the waiter, who as usual was in no hurry to respond. When he did come, it was to offer the viscount all the drinks of the establishment, with so much volubility, indeed, that Sartilly had some trouble in stopping him and explaining what he wished to know.

"Are you acquainted with the persons who were here a short time ago?" he said, pointing to the neighbouring stall.

"Do you think I occupy myself with the people who come here?" answered the waiter, insolently. "No, no; I have something else to do, and providing they spend their money, that's all I care for." And then, in genuine waiter style, he added: "What shall I bring you, sir? Porter, pale ale, whisky——"

Sartilly felt inclined to give a lesson to this insolent servant, but as he desired above all things to gain information he determined to try tactics which as a rule succeed with menials all over the world. So he drew a five-franc piece from his pocket, and showing it to the waiter in a significant manner, he said: "I thought I recognised the voice of one of my friends; but he left so quickly that I had not time to speak to him. I will give you this if you can tell me if it were he."

He imagined that his offer, which he considered very adroit, would have a favourable effect, and he was astonished to receive a still ruder reply, for the waiter, shrugging his shoulders, answered sneeringly: "Oh! no! You cannot catch me in that way; you must apply to some one else. And besides, my master does not want persons of your stamp here," he added, turning on his heels.

Sartilly, stupefied on hearing the fellow answer him in this manner, and refuse the proffered money, thought he must be dreaming, when it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps he had been taken for a police agent, and that he would not be able to draw anything from the waiter. He was confirmed in this suspicion on hearing the fellow give an account of the conversation to his master, adding: "Oh! he isn't a sharp one by any means. The idea of coming here in an overcoat trimmed with fur, and wearing patent leather boots to try and make me believe that he knew the servants who were in the next box!"

This remark in some measure enlightened the viscount. First it proved that he, Sartilly, had been taken by the waiter for a disguised detective; and secondly it acquainted him with the fact that his neighbours had been servants. On the other hand, however, the viscount realised that it would not only be useless, but dangerous, to remain in the place. Judging by the people who patronised this tavern, it was a very queer establishment, and if he tarried there he might meet with some disagreeable adventure. Besides, he could not hope to learn anything more of any interest. He had finished his supper and paid for it; so he rose up and went down the central passage, noticing that the customers drinking in the various boxes did not eye him in a very favourable manner. The landlord who was near the garden gate, looked at him from head to foot, as if wishing to know him well enough so as to refuse him admission into his establishment on any future occasion. The viscount could no longer doubt but what he was supposed to be a police-agent—and despite his preoccupations he was unable to restrain a smile as he thought of the absurdity of the mistake. After a moment's gaiety he relapsed into his

old reflections, again taking the road to Paris. It was now past ten o'clock; the rain and snow had ceased falling, and the stars sparkled in the heavens. However, it was a long distance to the Rue d'Astorg, and Sartilly was determined not to go there on foot; he hoped to find a cab at the Barrière de l'Etoile, and as he wished to avoid the deserted streets by which he had reached the tavern, he walked towards the wide Avenue de Neuilly.

The lamp outside the tavern was the only light in this deserted quarter, and the viscount, pulling up his collar and putting his hands in his pockets, walked on rapidly to warm himself. Although a little rain had fallen at the outset of the evening there had not been a thaw, so that his heels resounded on the hard firm soil, awakening at times such an echo along the broad thoroughfare that for a moment he imagined that some one was following him. He halted by way of precaution, and glanced round him. But it seemed absurd that he could be spied upon in a neighbourhood where no one could expect to meet him; and, in fact, although he looked and listened attentively he neither saw nor heard any one. He set off again, convinced that he had been mistaken, and as he felt cold, he went on as rapidly as possible. He went so fast, indeed, that he soon came in sight of the houses of the Rond-Point de Neuilly, but all of a sudden, slipping on some ice, he fell, losing his equilibrium all the more easily as his hands were in his pockets.

Hurt by this ridiculous fall, and feeling angry with himself, he was rising to his feet when he distinctly saw two men coming straight towards him. They were about thirty paces in the rear on the other side of the way, and their appearance had been so sudden it seemed as if they had sprung out of the ground. Sartilly realised that his fall had induced them to show themselves, as they hoped to find an easy prey in a prostrate man. This thought restored all his vigour and skill, and judging it useless and dangerous to struggle alone and unarmed with two footpads, who were probably provided with knives, he again went on at the same rapid pace towards the Avenue de Neuilly.

He expected that in this more frequented thoroughfare he would meet some passers-by, and see some open shops, and be able in some way or other to rid himself of these men who were following him.

They were running on behind him, but so far they did not gain any ground. Sartilly, who was not particularly alarmed by this pursuit which certainly could not be kept up to the city gate, had retained sufficient presence of mind to look round every now and then. He tried to distinguish the features and dress of his pursuers, but it was too dark for that, and they merely looked like moving shadows.

He was reaching the Rond-Point when he saw that one of them had disappeared, and he wondered if the fellow had abandoned the chase, or if he were executing some manœuvre to cut across his path. The viscount asked himself this question as he ran on, but he now felt very little uneasiness, as he thought he would soon meet some passers-by. He was also trying to imagine who these persons could be, whose bad intentions could no longer be doubted but whose animosity he could not explain; and then for the first time, it suddenly struck him that they must be his neighbours at the tavern, an idea which was not distasteful to him, as he wished to find out who they were.

"At all events," he muttered, "I shall soon know what I ought to believe."



He had nothing to defend himself with, not even a cane, but it seemed to him impossible but what a shout for help would be heard in the houses along the avenue, and his desire to see and identify his aggressors was so great that he almost dreaded their abandoning the pursuit. However, no one could be seen in the avenue, nor was there a solitary light in the houses. Sartilly, who had turned short at the Rond-Point, was now hastening towards the Arc de Triomphe, skirting the houses on the left hand side, and he was just reaching the corner of a narrow by-street when a man rose up before him. The viscount was going too fast to stop short, and at the same moment a heavy stick whirled round and came down as if about to break his skull.

Edmond was lithe and skilful; his English training had given him great suppleness of body and unusual vigour, and thus he partially escaped the blow. With great presence of mind and strength, he was able to slip aside, so that the stick which would have broken his skull only reached his shoulder. The blow had certainly been dealt by a well-practised and a strong arm, for the viscount staggered under it, and felt so keen a pain that he at first thought that his arm was broken; however, he did not lose his head or delay a moment. His situation was critical, for the villain lurking at the corner of the street was raising his stick for a second blow, while his accomplice was coming up at full speed to effect an attack in the rear. The only method left to Sartilly was to divide the forces of the enemy. He would be lost if he gave the other brigand time to arrive, but he might still escape if he could first rid himself of the man with the stick. So, as quick as thought he bent down, settled himself firmly on his legs, and then darted forward, head first, like a ram. This feat which he had learned from the Breton peasants did not fail in its effect, as the stick which again threatened him swung through the empty air; while his opponent, struck violently in the chest, was thrown against the wall of the side street.

Sartilly, not giving him time to recover breath, seized him by the throat with his hands. He already heard a rattling in the wretch's throat, but he had not fallen, and his accomplice was near at hand. In a few seconds more this unequal combat would have taken a fatal turn for the viscount, but an unhopd-for chance changed the aspect of the fight, for at the moment when the second assailant came up, a door opened on the other side of the avenue—the door of a tavern, no doubt—and out rushed several intoxicated men, singing and laughing. The fellow who was hurrying up undoubtedly feared the intervention of these drunkards, for abruptly turning round he ran away as fast as possible.

His companion, abandoned in this manner, and reduced to his own powers, was soon conquered, as Sartilly had only to tighten his hold on his neck to throw him down on the ground half strangled. All the same, the viscount realised that he had not a moment to lose in gaining a place of safety, another attack being very possible, as the two villains had probably not been alone. But he did not wish to go off without examining the man he had thrown down. Now that he had achieved this first victory he wished to ascertain whether this nocturnal attack had been made by his neighbours at the tavern.

The brigand was not dead, for he breathed heavily, like a half-strangled man recovering his breath. The important matter was to see his face, but it was not easy to do so, as the pale light which the stars gave was quite

insufficient to enable Sartilly to distinguish the features of his vanquished foe. In the wide avenue there was rather more light, but it would be both difficult and imprudent to draw the body there. It was necessary to make a hasty examination and then start off. The viscount accordingly knelt down, examined the man closely, and felt convinced he had never seen him before. He was a tall, strapping fellow of thirty or so, with a closely-shaven chin and whiskers cut brush fashion; this was all that Sartilly could distinguish in the darkness. Neither did his dress point out his occupation; his coat was of dark cloth, and he wore a cap upon his head. He might be a mechanic in easy circumstances, or a groom—a groom, the viscount thought, from the other side of the channel; however, this opinion was merely based upon the fact that under the fellow's coat he found a long waistcoat of an English cut.

To remain any longer might be perilous to Sartilly, and so he picked up his hat, and turned his face homeward, determined not to mention this affair to any one save Jottrat. Careless as to what became of the man he had half-strangled, he hurried on and did not pause to take breath until he was near the gate of Paris, then situated at the top of the Champs Elysées, just beyond the Arc de Triomphe. He was very much exhausted, and feeling a severe pain in his shoulder he longed to reach home, so as to ascertain if the brigand's blow had caused a fracture. Accordingly he jumped into the first cab he met, and twenty minutes later he reached the Rue d'Astorg.

He crossed the court-yard rapidly, and was about to go upstairs when he saw that the stable was open and lighted up. Being both surprised and displeased at seeing a light there at such an hour, he drew near and recognised Toby, who seemed busy examining Ralph's hoofs. On hearing a noise the groom quickly turned round, and seemed very much astonished at recognising his master. He became extremely pale, and Sartilly even thought he trembled slightly.

"Why are you not in bed?" he asked, angrily; "and what are you doing in the stable at night?"

"Why, sir, you know that Ralph was injured the other day," answered Toby, who had already recovered his self-possession, "and the doctor has ordered me to rub him three times a day with this ointment."

"I forbid your doing it at night-time, running the risk of setting the stable on fire!" said Sartilly, without examining particularly what his groom had been about. "Send Antoine to me immediately, and go to bed. I shall want you early to-morrow morning; and be ready, for I don't like to have to wait."

After this reproof, delivered in a tone which must have furnished Toby with food for reflection, the viscount hastened up to his room, and undressed himself. When old Antoine, from whom he had no secrets, arrived Edmond was busy examining his shoulder; the skin was not broken, but it was stiff and badly bruised, while the arm seemed quite benumbed. On the eve of a duel this was really a most unfortunate accident, and Sartilly, who in the midst of his nocturnal adventures had forgotten his quarrel at the club, remembered now with some anxiety that perhaps he would have to fight on the very next day.

"Oh, Lord! sir," said old Antoine, "pray what has happened to you?"

"Nothing; I have had a fall," answered Sartilly absently. He was reflecting at this moment on the probable consequence of his affair with Monsieur de Dohna, and the more he thought of it, the more impossible it

seemed that the duel could take place the next day. "In the morning," he thought, "I will see his seconds; they cannot see mine until the afternoon; it will take some time to make arrangements; so the fight cannot take place until the day after to-morrow, or perhaps until Thursday. I shall thus have time to see the notary, to find the History of Normandy in Roger's bookcase, and besides that I have thirty-six hours before me to set my shoulder all right." And this conclusion quite tranquillising him, he turned to Antoine, and asked him if anything had come for him during his absence.

"Yes, sir; there is a letter for you."

Sartilly took the note which the servant had laid on the mantelshelf, but the handwriting of the address was unknown to him. So he carelessly tore the envelope open and then read:

"Monsieur le Vicomte,—After what passed between us this evening, you will not be surprised at receiving a visit from my two seconds to-morrow morning. I must request you to place them immediately in connection with your own seconds, so that our meeting may take place in the course of the day. A diplomatic mission given me by my government obliges me to leave Paris without delay, so that I am desirous that everything may be over by to-morrow evening.

"Your obedient servant,

"BARON DE DOHNA."

"Zounds! but he is in a hurry!" Such was the exclamation that the perusal of this note drew from Sartilly, and Antoine, hearing it, did not neglect the opportunity of speaking, for he had his privileges, and he liked to use them.

"The footman who brought the note made the same remark, sir," said the valet; "he was a great, strapping fellow, with red whiskers, and with so strong a German accent that one would think he had been born at Strasbourg."

"At what hour did he call?"

"Between eight and half-past eight; he spoke first of all to Toby, who was leaving the stable to go out, as he does now every evening."

"Well, he hasn't lost much time," muttered the viscount; "one might really think he has guessed all that I have to attend to to-morrow, and wants to kill me quickly, to prevent my going to Mademoiselle de Mennsignac's. We will see about that, however," he added walking up and down his room.

Well skilled in the use of arms, Sartilly felt no apprehension as to the material result of a meeting with Monsieur de Dohna: but he felt annoyed at the delay and changes this duel would cause in his plans, and his annoyance was quite evident to the faithful Antoine, who for thirty years had been in the habit of studying his master's face. "Have you received any bad news, sir?" he ventured to ask, on seeing the viscount continue his walk and mutter disconnected words between his teeth.

On hearing this question Sartilly was unable to repress a gesture of impatience, but there was such a look of sincere devotion on the old valet's face that one could not reasonably get angry with him.

"No, my friend, no," said Sartilly, gently; "I have a great many unpleasant affairs to attend to to-morrow, and I am suffering a little—that's all."

Antoine shook his head, for this vague answer did not satisfy him—instinctively feeling, as he did, that some danger threatened his master. “I hope,” he went on timidly, “that if you have an affair of honour on hand, sir, you won’t think of fighting with your shoulder in the state it is, for it is very much hurt, and to-morrow your arm will be quite swollen.”

The viscount’s annoyance was not proof against his old servant’s expressions of interest. Besides, he might need Antoine’s services in some way or other, and it was needless to conceal the truth.

“And what makes you think I am going to fight?” Sartilly asked, smiling.

“If I had not guessed it,” said Antoine, sadly, “I should have learnt it from Toby.”

“What, Toby? What has he to do with it, and who could have told him?”

“He must have heard it from that square-headed German footman who brought the note, for he told me that you had had a quarrel at your club, and that to-morrow—”

“This is too bad!” interrupted Sartilly, very much irritated; “and I shall turn Master Toby out of doors.”

“Oh, your warning, sir, didn’t prevent him from staying out as usual all the evening,” replied Antoine, delighted at having an opportunity of finding fault with the groom; “he had just come in when you arrived.”

“Very well; I will attend to him to-morrow, and as for you, my old Antoine, I shall have several commissions to give you in the morning, so you must wake me up at eight o’clock.”

“But this duel, sir!—injured as you are!” urged the old valet.

“Don’t be uneasy; my hand is still strong enough to give a lesson to that Cossack; and besides, if I am in too much pain, I will fight with pistols. Go to bed, and don’t forget to call me at eight o’clock.”

Antoine left his master with regret, and the viscount continued walking up and down the room reflecting on the coming events of the next day. The first thing to be done was to choose his seconds, and in the absence of his best friend, Roger, he thought of applying to Monsieur de Châteaubrun, who had been present at the quarrel. It even occurred to him to ask the captain to choose another second amongst the officers of his regiment, so that the affair with Monsieur de Dohna might not be unduly noised abroad. The captain and Sartilly were sufficiently intimate for the former not to refuse this request, and besides, he had sufficient experience in duelling matters to conduct negotiations properly.

Accordingly the viscount, before going to bed, wrote a letter to the captain, for Antoine to take early in the morning, and, in spite of the precise terms of Monsieur de Dohna’s note, he concluded that the day would be spent by his seconds in arranging the conditions of the duel, so that he would have time to meet the notary at twelve o’clock at Made-moiselle de Mensignac’s. Afterwards he meant to make his search in the library, and in the afternoon he would have leisure to make his last arrangements. Of course, he could not decide upon anything before knowing his friend Roger’s secret, for on the nature of this secret depended the instructions he must leave behind him, supposing that this duel had a fatal result as regards himself. Having thus combined his programme he decided to go to bed. His adversary’s note had driven his night’s adventure out his head, but the pain in his shoulder warned him that he greatly needed rest. “Decidedly,” he thought, on going to bed, “I shall be able

to arrange everything to-morrow, and even finish with Monsieur de Noreff's defender if he insists upon it."

With this consoling idea, and in spite of his injured shoulder, he fell into that deep sleep that always follows upon violent emotions.

When he awoke in the morning, he saw Antoine standing beside his bed, holding in his hand a tray on which were two visiting cards, bearing names of a Slavonic character unknown to him. However, understanding perfectly who they came from, he immediately rose.

"As soon as you have shown these gentlemen in," he said to Antoine, while hurriedly dressing, "take this note to Captain de Châteaubrun, on the Quai d'Orsay; wait for an answer, and return here immediately, without losing a moment. Let Toby know that you are absent, and forbid him to go out."

The valet, much more disturbed than his master, took the letter for the captain, and then introduced the two visitors, who from their appearance and accent Sartilly easily saw were Russians. They maintained an attitude of stiff politeness, saying they had come merely to know the address of Monsieur de Sartilly's seconds, and formally repeating Monsieur de Dohna's desire that the duel should take place the same day. Not a word was said about any attempt at conciliating the adversaries, and besides, Sartilly would not have listened to a remark of the kind. Formal courtesy was shown on either side and nothing more. "Our friend, sir, having received the offence, demands the choice of weapons," said one of the Russians, by way of closing the conversation.

"That is the business of my seconds," Sartilly answered, rather disdainfully, as he showed his visitors out. "And I will conform to whatever Monsieur de Châteaubrun decides upon."

Once alone, the viscount finished dressing, and impatiently awaited Antoine's return. As this affair was going on so rapidly, he regretted not having warned Châteaubrun earlier, as he might be out, or prevented by his duties from attending to the matter. However, in this respect Sartilly was soon reassured, as in less than an hour's time Antoine brought the captain's reply: "I accept, my dear friend," said Monsieur de Châteaubrun, "and am awaiting the arrival of the Muscovite ambassadors. De Bréhal, who belongs to my squadron, and whom you know very well, will act with me with pleasure. We will do our best; swords, if we can manage it, and the Bois de Boulogne to-morrow morning, if that savage Dohna does not insist positively upon having the meeting to-day. As soon as everything is arranged I will come and see you. I have your letter, and know exactly what to do."

Sartilly was pleased with this note, and he felt quite satisfied. He could now attend to the other pressing matters which he had in hand. He had written to the captain to meet him at the Mensignac mansion between twelve and two o'clock, and as he now suffered very little from his arm, he felt he could depend upon his skill as a swordsman; besides, he was also an excellent shot, and so cared very little what weapons were chosen. He gave orders to Antoine not to leave the house until his return; to have the cabriolet got ready for him at half-past eleven o'clock; wrote a few letters on personal affairs; put his deeds and family papers in order, and afterwards ate his breakfast with an excellent appetite. He reserved penning his last directions until his return from Mademoiselle de Mensignac's; and he took care to place Roger's letter in his pocket, as he would need it as a guide when visiting the mysterious bookcase.

He had not forgotten his causes of complaint against Toby ; but as he absolutely needed his services for the day, he deferred the reproofs he had in store for him until the morrow. Besides, the groom, not seeming to think there was any cause for finding fault with him, was waiting below for Sartilly in an irreproachable attitude, and while mounting behind the cabriolet his childlike face retained its habitual expression of mildness.

At twelve o'clock precisely the viscount stopped his horse before the Mensignac mansion, and expected to see the notary's carriage at the door, as Monsieur Calmet's punctuality was proverbial ; however it was not there. Another surprise awaited him, for as he was crossing the courtyard, the porter ran after him to tell him that Mademoiselle de Mensignac, being indisposed, wished to postpone the interview with the notary until the next day. In fact, Monsieur Calmet had already been warned of the postponement by a note the evening before.

Distressed by this disappointment, for he particularly wished to see Jeanne, but desirous of accomplishing his other mission, Sartilly repaired straight to the library.

When he reached the massive oaken door his heart beat violently, and his hand trembled when he touched the lock, for he knew he would again see the stain of blood, and he thought sadly of the murdered woman. The noise of the heavy steel key turning in the lock awakened a prolonged echo in the spacious room. Only the evening before Sartilly had felt, in crossing this threshold, a feeling of unutterable fear ; but the time for superstitious dread had passed, and phantoms are not thought of when a man faces terrible realities. So the viscount entered without hesitation and closed the door behind him, so that he might not be disturbed in his search. At this time of day, the gallery, lighted up by a bright winter's sun, did not at all look like a place haunted by phantoms. It rather had the appearance of a museum, with its pictures, its suits of armour, and old china and *faïence* shining against the dark woodwork and tapestry.

Sartilly drew near one of the high French windows that overlooked the Seine, and could not help gazing for an instant upon the wonderful view which he had so often admired with Roger. Below him the waters of the Seine rolled slowly on, and their leaden hue brought out strikingly the dazzling whiteness of the houses of Passy, perched on the side of the hill. In the distance the woods of Meudon extended in dark masses, intersected by the clear lines of the terrace and château. All spoke of life in this bright landscape. The manufactories of Grenelle belched forth clouds of smoke from their high red chimneys, rising up here and there like Egyptian obelisks, and the paddle wheels of a heavy steam-tug raised the water of the river which fell again in silvery cascades, while on the further edge of the plain a steam-engine darted along puffing forth its feathery vapour.

All the life out-of-doors contrasted so strongly with the silence and solitude of the library, that Sartilly unwillingly left the window, and it required almost an effort to bring back his thoughts to the object of his visit ; however time was precious, and the viscount very much wished to return home before the duel, not liking Châteaubrun to have the trouble of running after him to the Mensignac mansion.

In order not to make a mistake in his investigations, he again read Roger's letter, which he had brought with him, and all the indications being so clear and precise, he felt sure of easily finding the hiding-place ; however, first of all he must discover the bookcase. Mensignac had told him there was one between each window, and at the first glance

they all seemed alike. The viscount on examining them one after another could not detect any difference in them, and he began to fear some difficulty, when a very simple idea occurred to him. Although he did not sufficiently remember the outward aspect of the bookcase which had formerly belonged to him, he had not forgotten the secret spring, and he knew where to find the knob which he must press to work this spring. He therefore began to open each piece of furniture in succession, and seeing with delight that the keys were in all the doors this proved no difficult matter. He examined two without finding the spring, but as soon as he opened the third he remembered and recognised it.

So Roger's secret was there, but, at the moment of penetrating it, Sartilly felt a strange uneasiness. The scruples that had assailed him before breaking the seal of Roger's letter returned to his mind with redoubled force. It seemed impious to violate this deposit, and he hesitated a long time before making the decisive gesture; but at last on his touching the spring the bottom shelf went quickly back, displaying in a secret hiding-place some twenty large volumes with red-edged leaves and antique bindings. The particulars given by Roger proved exact. On the back of each volume a title was printed in gilt letters, and Sartilly saw that all the titles were the same. So the twenty volumes were but portions of one and the same work. In fact the viscount read these words, repeated a score of times, "History of the Province of Normandy." He removed the seventh volume in accordance with Mensignac's instructions, and found that it was too heavy to be examined standing. So he took a seat at the large table in the middle of the library, and, placing the volume before him, he opened it. The paper was thick and tough and the printing remarkably clear, so that it was easy to peruse these annals of the old Norman duchy, penned in the days of Louis XIV by a learned Benedictine monk, "Page 119, 19th line," murmured Sartilly rapidly turning the leaves, and he was about to reach the page on which he would find his friend's secret contained in one sentence, when he heard a gentle knock outside. Annoyed and nervous, he shut up the book and went to open the door. He wondered who could have come to interrupt him at such an unsuitable moment; and was disagreeably surprised to find that the person who had knocked was Monsieur de Châteaubrun.

"Excuse me, my dear friend for disturbing you," said the captain, "but they told me at your house that you were here, and we haven't a moment to lose."

"You have done right in coming," said the viscount, who never forgot the rules of politeness; "but, first of all, I must thank you——"

"You can thank me this evening, but for the moment there are more serious matters in question."

"What are they, then? Does my duel seem so serious to you?"

"Oh, no; the duel itself cannot make you or me feel at all anxious, but it is necessary you should know the wishes and incredible pretensions of our Russians."

"Nothing can astonish me on the part of fellows such as they are. Pray speak out."

"Well, everything was arranged according to our wishes. Dohna himself had chosen swords, the meeting was to take place near the pond at Auteuil to-morrow morning at eight o'clock; the seconds had left, and I was just stepping into a cab to give you an account of the interview, when my two savages came back to tell me that their friend being obliged

to leave by post this afternoon the meeting would have to take place to-day."

"He wrote to me yesterday, making the same statement; and after all it is not so disagreeable to me to have it over sooner. I am going home, now, and at four o'clock I will be in the Bois de Boulogne."

"Oh, if it were to take place at four o'clock, I would not have fought against it as I have done. But this crazy Muscovite says he must start before three o'clock, and he wants to force us to be on the ground by two."

"But that is absurd, and affairs of this kind are not managed in that way, I have some letters to write, arrangements to make, and absolutely refuse."

"I said all that, and many other things besides, but they would not listen. They told me that Monsieur de Dohna would be at the meeting-place at two o'clock with his travelling carriage; that he would wait forty-five minutes with his watch in his hand, and if you did not come by a quarter before three o'clock he would leave the ground."

"Very well; a good journey to him!"

"Wait! this is not all; his two seconds will be on the ground with him, and if you do not come they will draw up a report after their fashion, and have it sent to all the clubs."

"Ah! is it like that?" said the viscount, pale with anger; "this miserable fellow wants me to kill him immediately. So be it. I warrant you that the post-chaise will not take him to Russia."

"Well, my dear friend," said the captain, "I think you are right; and to refuse would be right also; no one would blame you, as you have given sufficient proofs of your courage. Perhaps, however, it is better that all the wrong should be on the side of those brutes. That will not prevent my saying two words to-morrow to one of those rascally seconds,—the little one particularly, who has a name to make a horse sneeze. I dislike him extremely, and I have a good lesson in reserve for him."

"But we shall hardly have time to get there," interrupted Sartilly, taking out his watch.

"Plenty of time; we have still three-quarters of an hour, and the pond of Auteuil is close by."

"And the weapons?"

"Oh, be easy on that point," said Châteaubrun. "I was almost sure that you would not do him the favour of letting him wait for us, and I brought Bréhal with me; he is below in a cab with two pairs of swords."

"Let us start, then!"

The book that contained Roger's secret had remained upon the table, and Sartilly thought for an instant of examining it, but he did not feel sufficiently composed to read and understand the sentence which his friend had commended to his notice.

"It will be time enough this evening," he muttered, and shutting up the bookcase he took the volume under his arm, to the profound astonishment of the captain, and went towards the staircase.

"What the deuce are you going to do with that old book?" asked Châteaubrun, laughing. "Is it the History of Russia that you want to read to Monsieur de Dohna on the field?"

"No," answered the viscount; "but when I have killed Monsieur de Dohna with a sword-thrust, I will kill those who have hired him with this book."



## VIII.

## THE POND AT AUTEUIL.

IN his haste Sartilly had forgotten to close the secret compartment of the bookcase. He thought of his neglect as he went down stairs, and would have returned had not the captain reminded him that they had barely time to arrive at the appointed hour. "Since we have decided to do as these savages wish," said Châteaubrun, "let us, at least, try to be the first on the ground."

The viscount, desiring very much to have the affair over, made no objection; and, besides, he said to himself that the bookcase now only contained some unimportant books, as the volume with the secret was in his hands.

The officer's cab was waiting at the gate; it was a common hack, chosen expressly for the occasion, with six seats, and drawn by two horses. Sartilly's trap was standing a few paces off under Toby's care. When the groom had seen the captain, whom he knew by sight, arrive, he had no doubt guessed what was going to take place, for he had strolled about near the cab, and would no doubt have ventured to take a peep inside it had not Monsieur de Bréhal looked out of the window. Sartilly, on leaving the house was too much preoccupied to pay any attention to Toby's pranks; so, telling him to drive the cabriolet home, he jumped into the hack with Monsieur de Châteaubrun, who called out to the driver: "The pond at Auteuil."

The viscount shook hands cordially with Monsieur de Bréhal, thanking him for his assistance.

"Indeed, sir," said Monsieur de Bréhal, "without speaking of the pleasure it gives me to be of service to you, nothing will be more agreeable to me than your giving Monsieur de Dohna a good lesson with your sword."

"I will try not to have disturbed you for nothing," answered Sartilly, smiling.

The heavy vehicle started off, and rolled on in the direction of Passy. At the moment it turned the viscount could see from the window that Toby, instead of obeying him, was quietly talking to the porter. At this sight Sartilly decided that he would do himself the pleasure of dismissing his groom that same evening, and he only regretted not having got rid of him before.

"I have brought, as I told you, two pairs of swords; they are excellent, and quite suited to you," now remarked Châteaubrun. "Even if the Russians also are properly provided, we will ask them to use ours, as they have already had the choice of weapons, and it was they who selected swords; it is our turn now."

"Provided I fight, the conditions are indifferent to me," muttered Sartilly.

"You are wrong," said Châteaubrun, in the sententious tone of a man who believes himself to be an authority in duelling affairs; "you would do wrong not to take such advantages as may belong to you. I know that you are a good swordsman, but these foreigners have an odd method of fighting which sometimes becomes dangerous, and I trust you will pay attention to the feints Dohna may make, for, having insisted so strongly on

an immediate meeting, he must feel sure of success ; and yet, I don't know why, I don't think him brave."

"I don't know him," began Monsieur de Bréhal, "but if he is at all like his seconds, I should not be surprised if he were to play you some treacherous trick."

"That's true," said Châteaubrun ; "and now, who is this Monsieur de Dohna ? He was received at the club this winter as a temporary member, and that was a great mistake, as he is not known at the Russian embassy, and, in fact, no one knows what he has been doing in Paris."

"But this mission, that obliges him to start this evening ?"

"Oh, there are missions of more than one kind, and this one of Dohna's may be one that cannot be acknowledged ; but now I think of it, Sartilly, did you know him before your discussion of last evening ?" asked Châteaubrun.

"Very little ; I never saw him except at the club, and have never spoken to him three times in my life."

"Then this quarrel is very strange, and I am almost inclined to believe that this Muscovite must have had some diplomatic motive in seeking it. Do you conspire in favour of the Poles, my dear fellow ?"

"You know very well that I never meddle with politics," said Sartilly, with a touch of impatience ; "and I think it rather late in the day to inquire into the motive of a duel which will take place in a quarter of an hour's time, for here we are at Auteuil."

The captain realised that his friend wished to avoid entering into any explanation, and so he did not insist on the point.

The vehicle was now entering the Bois de Boulogne, and proceeding towards the meeting place, which at that time was very different to what it is now. A very narrow path, obstructed by briars, led to the border of a marshy hole that did not deserve the name of pond. The stagnant water disappeared amid the reeds, and high bushes surrounded on all sides a kind of clearing situated between the mere and the wood. The carriage-road passed along a hundred paces away. Sartilly and his seconds were therefore obliged to alight, and when they were on foot the captain took the viscount aside, and asked him if he had any directions to give him.

"None," answered Sartilly, but suddenly changing his mind, and taking a note-book from his pocket, he wrote a few lines on it with a lead-pencil ; then, tearing out the leaf, he placed it in the volume of the History of Normandy, which he still held in his hand, much to the astonishment of his seconds. "In case of accident," he said to Châteaubrun, "I beg you to give this book yourself to Mademoiselle Jeanne de Mensignac, whom I am to marry."

"You can depend upon its being done," said the captain ; "but are you going to carry this book on to the ground ? It would be, to say the least, rather original."

"It will do if I find it again after the affair is over," said the viscount. "I will leave it on the cab seat ; but you will promise me not to forget it, if anything should happen to me. I swear to you that this isn't a mere whim," he added, seeing a smile upon the captain's face, "there is nothing of more importance to me than that this book should reach Mademoiselle de Mensignac."

Châteaubrun became grave again, and pressing his friend's hand, promised to obey his instructions.

"It appears we are the first," said Mousieur de Bréhal, taking the swords from the cab.

"Oh! we shan't have to wait long," answered the captain; "listen."

A sound of wheels and a cracking of whips could be heard very distinctly in the direction of Auteuil, and very soon a cab came along the narrow road, followed by a post-chaise drawn by four horses, whom the postilions had a deal of trouble in holding in so as to avoid an accident to the humble vehicle that preceded them.

"Well," said the captain, laughing, "Dohna is bent on executing his programme to the end, and we are going to have a strange duel. Since he is in such a hurry don't keep him waiting long, my dear Sartilly, for one of those good thrusts that you know so well how to give."

The viscount nodded his head, as much as to say, "If I do not succeed it will not be my fault;" and then they walked towards the pond.

Bréhal and Châteaubrun each carried a pair of swords, and as they were about to pass between the bushes the captain called Sartilly's attention to the three Russians who were now coming along the path. It was two o'clock, and splendid weather. A duel at the pond at Auteuil would be impossible now-a-days, but at that time this part of the wood was deserted, and in winter particularly there was no danger of being disturbed by promenaders. As for the keepers who might have come upon the scene, they generally showed themselves good-natured, and more than one of them derived a profit from the duels. If any one was wounded they offered their services, and, if need were, the use of their house; and on the other hand they oft-times prepared a little breakfast to follow upon some affair of no great account. The spot was perfectly well-chosen for a duel; the ground seemed exactly fitted for the purpose, as the space between the thicket and pond was amply sufficient; the grass, too, was thick and firm under foot, there was no fear of slipping, and the trees of the wood were high enough to screen the combatants from the sun, the rays of which, even at this season of the year, might have somewhat troubled them. The two adverse groups reached the clearing almost at the same time. Monsieur de Dohna was in travelling costume, and looked anxious. They saluted each other politely but coldly—more coldly even than is customary at a meeting of this kind; and the seconds began immediately making their arrangements. To the great surprise of the captain, the Russians did not insist upon the choice of weapons, but agreed to leave it to chance, which favoured Sartilly. During the preparations the viscount observed his adversary very stealthily, and it seemed to him that Monsieur de Dohna was paler than usual, and that he looked anxiously around him. However, Sartilly had not time enough to be very critical in his observations, as his two seconds came to fetch him.

"It is all arranged," said the captain, "and you are to fight with my swords. I think they will suit your hand better; and the fight will last, you know, until one of you is thoroughly disabled."

"Very well," said Sartilly, who now felt in the best disposition that a man can possibly be in to fight a duel, that is to say, well in body and calm in mind.

The three Russians were conferring together as they drew near, and Châteaubrun gave his last directions to his friend. "That Cossack has immense legs," he said. "It's a question of frequently retreating and tiring him out. Above all, no false shame; mind, retreating isn't running away, and I am bent on taking you home unhurt."

"Don't be uneasy; I am going to do my best. I am bound to be careful, for it is essential that I should live—not for my own sake, but for the sake of others."

The spot where the adversaries were to stand and cross swords had been duly marked out in a corner of the clearing where the ground was perfectly level. The two combatants took off their coats, each choosing a sword, and stood upon guard—Sartilly facing the wood, and the Russian with his back to the bushes. The four seconds placed themselves at the proper distance, and the captain pronounced the decisive words, "Now then, gentlemen!"

A clashing of steel followed, and for some seconds there were hurried movements, as if the two combatants were feeling and trying their skill. Monsieur de Dohna had the advantage of height, and seemed disposed to profit by it. His extended arms and long nimble legs seemed to guarantee him from a home thrust. To make amends for this, Sartilly had a wrist of steel and remarkable suppleness of body—two qualities sufficient to render the chances equal. However, after the first bout the viscount's superior skill became evident. His close and rapid parries, his skilful and direct attacks, his bearing and composure while fighting, seemed all the more remarkable, as his adversary's movements were feeble and his attitude awkward and uneasy.

Still the Russian defended himself with no very great disadvantage against the prudent attacks of Sartilly; but he did not take the offensive, and it seemed as if his plan were to tire out his adversary. The viscount's seconds remarked these tactics, and Châteaubrun grumbled in a low voice. Had it not been contrary to the code of duelling he would have certainly expressed his opinion aloud. As it was, he contented himself by suspending the combat, after a bout which had lasted more than two minutes.

The two combatants, while reposing, offered a striking contrast. Sartilly, with an animated complexion, bright eyes, and erect figure, looked like a soldier under arms, and at a glance one could see that he felt sure of himself. Monsieur de Dohna, however, very pale and a little bent, was casting uneasy glances around him, and it really seemed as if he were expecting some one. Moreover, his seconds, the other Russians, did not look at their ease.

"Decidedly," thought Châteaubrun, "that Cossack is a coward, and Sartilly will soon be able to settle accounts with him."

With this consoling idea, he gave the signal to begin again, and this time the viscount, perfectly master of himself, and knowing the force of his adversary, attacked him freely, making two or three dangerous thrusts, which to his great surprise were warded off. The captain, who was observing the fight attentively, and who had thought the Russian a dead man after Sartilly's last lunge, was astonished at seeing him still on his legs weakly parrying the attack.

"Is it calculation?" said Châteaubrun to himself in a low voice, "and is the villain more skilful than I thought him?"

Sartilly probably had the same suspicion, for he became more prudent, and no longer risked rash thrusts, for there was something inexplicable in the Russian's conduct. Evidently enough this man concealed his skill, for he was a fencer of the first class; any one else but a master would have failed to parry Sartilly's last lunge. However, it seemed as if the Muscovite were paralysed by some reason which Sartilly could not guess. Merely judging by his adversary's demeanour under arms he might have

imagined that fear hampered his powers, but it was distasteful to him to imagine that he had to deal with a coward. On the other hand it might be that Monsieur de Dohna was desirous of sparing him—an idea which was also odious to the viscount, who, when he crossed swords for the fourth time, felt determined to bring the duel to a close.

As the engagement had progressed the combatants had drawn rather nearer to the wood, and on beginning again Monsieur de Dohna, who still had his hack to the thicket, retreated three or four steps, so that the adversaries came still closer to the hushes that surrounded the glade. Sartilly, thinking that the right moment had arrived, coolly pressed thrust after thrust, in due accordance with the pitiless logic of the sword, which combines everything and leaves nothing to chance. The Russian defended himself at first with no very great inferiority, but the viscount gained upon him by his quickness, and a thrust not being parried quickly enough the Russian's shoulder was slightly pierced and his shirt stained with blood.

However, at the moment when Sartilly, drawing back his sword, was preparing to give a decisive lunge, a feeble cry was heard from the thicket behind Monsieur de Dohna.

There are actions which it is impossible to account for exactly, they are so prompt and simultaneous. By an instinctive movement the viscount's eyes turned towards the point whence this cry had come, and instead of lunging out at his adversary, he remained with his arm half raised, for above the bushes he had just seen the hideous face of the man with the basket. A second had sufficed for the viscount to recognise the frightful old fellow who on that fatal morning had disappeared like a phantom; and the apparition fairly petrified Sartilly, who, with his chest unguarded, and with his eyes fixed on the thicket, did not see the swift approach of Dohna's sword, which meeting no obstacle, pierced his right side. The unfortunate viscount fell senseless to the ground, the man in the thicket disappearing so quickly that the seconds, not even catching a glimpse of him, could not understand what had caused Sartilly's hesitation.

"Thunder!" cried the captain, "there is a fatality in this affair," and he darted towards his friend, who gave no sign of life.

The Russian seconds had at once approached Monsieur de Dohna, who was lividly pale and evidently trembling. The Muscovite seemed to be deliberating, while Châteaubrun uncovered the breast of the wounded man, and Bréhal held up his head.

However, after a few moments' conversation with his seconds, Monsieur de Dohna came forward and said: "Gentlemen, I hope you will do me the justice to admit that all has passed honourably."

Whether the captain was absorbed in tending Sartilly, or whether it did not suit him to give the Russian the approval he asked for, he remained silent.

"My duty, unfortunately, obliges me to start immediately; but these gentlemen who have been my seconds, will willingly take my place, and if Monsieur de Sartilly has any need of help——"

"I merely beg of them to remember my address," said Châteaubrun; "if they have forgotten it, I will refresh their memory."

The two Russians did not notice this defiant reply—rather out of place, it must be confessed, under the circumstances—but howed coldly, and, after bandaging Monsieur de Dohna's slight wound, they went away with him. A moment later the noise of wheels and bells announced that

the post-chaise was driving away with the conquerors, and the officers remained alone with the wounded man in the silent glade.

"I believe it is all over with the viscount," said the captain, examining the triangular wound which Dolna's sword had inflicted above the right clavicle.

"What a mistake we made in not bringing a surgeon!" cried Monsieur de Bréhal.

"It is always like that in hurried affairs," said the captain; "if I had only known last night I should have had time to arrange matters properly."

"Let us carry him to the cab," interrupted Monsieur de Bréhal; "the most important thing at this moment is to find a doctor."

Châteaubrun being of the same opinion lifted the head of his unfortunate friend, and Monsieur de Bréhal raising his feet, they carried their sad burden to the vehicle. The driver, looking terribly frightened, wanted to drive off rather than render any assistance, but a few energetic words from the captain brought him to his senses, and he helped them in placing Sartilly on the cushions.

"And now what are we to do?" asked Bréhal.

"Let me see," said the captain. "I know a doctor at Auteuil, not two steps from here; we will go and see him at once, and he can tell us whether it will be safe to take poor Sartilly back to the Rue d'Astorg."

They started off at a walk, the two seconds on the front seat, and Sartilly lying on the back cushions almost without breathing.

"Carency of the 9th Cuirassiers received a thrust just in the same part, and he didn't die of it, you know," said Monsieur de Bréhal.

"I am afraid," replied Châteaubrun, shaking his head, "that there is not much hope for poor Sartilly; the wound has not bled much, which is a bad sign. Do you understand, for I can't," he added, "do you understand how that Russian, whom Sartilly could have transfixed twenty times, managed to run him through like a lark? Did you see the thrust, Bréhal?"

"Perfectly; with the slightest movement of the wrist the viscount could have parried it."

"Well, then, he must have let the Russian kill him purposely?"

"I think he was seized with giddiness, for his eyes turned and his hand dropped just at the very moment when he could have spitted the Cossack!"

"I can't rid myself of the idea that this duel was a murder, and I will have it cleared up some day or other," said the captain.

However, they were now reaching the doctor's house. Châteaubrun went in, while his friend remained to take care of the wounded man, and also to prevent a crowd from gathering round the cab. By great good luck, the doctor was at home, and hastily came down stairs. He was a young, intelligent, and well-educated man, who, thanks to a handsome fortune, could wait for practice to come to him. He knew the captain personally, and had met the viscount often enough to take a special interest in him, so he jumped into the cab, and began his examination with that promptitude of touch and keenness of glance by which one immediately recognises a skilful practitioner. The captain and Monsieur de Bréhal, standing at the door, anxiously awaited the sentence that was to decide Sartilly's fate. "It is a serious but not a mortal wound," at last said the doctor, quietly. "Where does Monsieur de Sartilly live?"

"It is a long way from here, in the Rue d'Astorg."

"No matter, we must go there; the wounded man can bear the motion, and when he is convalescent he will be better in his own house than elsewhere."

No objection was offered by the seconds; in fact the doctor knew best, and must be implicitly obeyed. So while he and Monsieur de Bréhal took seats inside the vehicle the captain climbed on to the box beside the driver, in view of regulating the horse's pace, and avoiding any jolting. Monsieur de Chateaubrun was so overwhelmed by the sad termination of the duel that Sartilly's directions had entirely escaped his mind, and it was only at the very moment when the vehicle stopped in the Rue d'Astorg that he remembered the singular commission that had been given him.

"What a disagreeable task!" he grumbled, as he alighted from the box. "To tell this distressing tale to the young girl won't be pleasant; and then there's that old book that I had forgotten—I hope it is inside all right."

The driver had no doubt heard this last remark, for he took it upon himself to answer: "Beg pardon, sir, but was it a big square book, that you had put under the front cushion?"

"Yes; and I hope it is there still."

"Why, no, sir; I gave it to the man whom you sent to fetch it."

"Thunder!" said the captain, furiously; "what man?"

"An old man with grey hair, who looked very respectable; and he told me that it was a book containing the rules of duelling, and that you needed it."

Châteaubrun, filled with consternation at this strange news, could not find a word to reply, and just then the doctor called out to him to come and help carry the wounded man. So he turned to open the door of the vehicle when he felt the driver touch his arm. "Excuse me, sir," said the driver, "but here's a paper that was in the book, and which the old man let fall without noticing it."

The captain eagerly took the paper, and recognised it as the leaf which Sartilly had torn from his memorandum-book, tracing a few lines upon it just before the duel. "This is very fortunate," said Châteaubrun, placing the paper in his pocket; "but there are a great many things which require clearing up in all this." And then, with the help of his two friends, he removed the wounded man, who was still unconscious, out of the cab.

## IX.

### JOTTRAT'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

IN a small and poorly-furnished room in the Rue des Marais Saint Germain, one month, day for day, after the duel in which Edmond de Sartilly had fallen dangerously wounded, a man sat at a white deal table examining some papers. It was evening; a coal fire burnt faintly in the grate of the small chimney-piece, and a brass lamp placed near the window dimly lighted up this poor abode. The floor, with its uneven tiled flooring, the white curtains which long usage had made yellow, the worn-out cane-seated chairs—all about the place spoke of poverty, or at least of the occupant's carelessness.

Strange contrast! On the deal table stood an ebony casket incrusting

with steel, that must have been the work of some great artist of the last century. This casket was open, and amid folded parchments could be seen some glittering gold ; while bending over this treasure, like a miser counting his wealth, sat Jottrat—for it was he—successively unfolding the papers contained in the casket, reading them with attention, and then laying them on the table in methodical order.

While devoting himself to this work, he glanced more than once at the bright gold ; but his hand never stopped to touch it, and it could be divined that this man was proof against its seduction, as a more powerful passion filled his heart. His eyes, which never rested for long on the precious metal, brightened as he ran over the half-effaced writings of the documents spread before him, and when he had read them, he rested his forehead on his hands absorbed in thought. The dim light of the lamp, striking obliquely upon his hollow cheeks, brought out the wan paleness of his wearied features, and one might have taken him for an anchorite meditating in the desert.

The casket gradually became emptied of the papers, and there only remained beside the gold an oval medallion, of which only the black velvet back could be seen. Jottrat hesitated a long time before touching it, and when at last he found courage to do so his hand trembled. However, with a violent effort at self-control, he turned the medallion, and the portrait of a child was seen—a child with fair curling hair, rosy lips, blue eyes, and a bright, intelligent countenance.

Jottrat looked at it steadily ; in fact it seemed as if he could not take his eyes from it. His mute contemplation had lasted a long time, when suddenly big tears dropped upon the table ; and covering the miniature with kisses, and bursting into violent sobs—"Henry," he cried, in a heartrending voice, "my son, my darling child, where are you ? what have they done with you ?"

After this explosion of grief, the detective rested his head upon his arms which he had laid upon the table, and remained motionless, overwhelmed and inert. The loud ticking of a painted wooden clock, the only ornament of the mantelpiece, aroused him from his reverie.

"Nine o'clock !" he said, raising his head ; "a month is over, and for a month we have learnt nothing ! nothing ! Apologies have been made to Monsieur de Noreff, and the affair is already forgotten at the Prefecture. Will he ever come, that young man who wants to revenge his friend just as I wish to revenge my loss ?"

Jottrat rose up, and walking about the room in a state of great agitation, continued : "I must be crazy ; he come to the house of a detective !—he, the Viscount de Sartilly !—perhaps he also has forgotten this affair," and the unfortunate man bitterly added : "Ah ! it is only I who remember !"

He sat down again by the table, his contracted features gradually assuming an expression of energetic resolution. "Well, be it so," he said, suddenly ; "I will act alone."

And taking up one by one the papers that he had just arranged he began some singular work. He had before him a large sheet of paper, covered with indications that seemed to bear no relation to each other. Thus, at the top of the sheet of paper, he had written these words :

"24th of May, 1830. Henry carried off at Havre ; the ship, the 'Voroneje,' of Riga. End of 1830, last search made by the St. Petersburg police."



Then a little lower down began a rather explicit notice on an entirely different subject :

"Noreff returned to France at the beginning of 1832.—Lumila Ludloff and her sister Vanda, 19 and 8 years old.—Affair of the Polish lists; Russian landing in La Vendée planned.—General de Mensignac died March 8th, 1833.—Proceedings brought against him three weeks previously for taking part in a conspiracy to restore Charles X.—Noreff's style of life and rate of expenditure change after Mensignac's death.—Frequent absences from 1833 to 1848. Sojourning in Paris since that period.—The papers at the Prefecture de Police contain no account of him prior to 1833."

And in one corner, right at the bottom of the page, were these lines in a finer handwriting. "I thought I saw Susanne in a private carriage in the Bois de Boulogne, and with a young girl sitting beside her, on the 7th April, 1838.—Wrote for the last time to Glasgow in 1840, final replies; no news of her either in Scotland or Normandy."

Jottrat perused these enigmatic sentences several times, his eyes passing from one passage to the other as if hoping to discover by what secret link they might be brought together.

"Yes," he said, slowly, "the explanation is there. The marquis has disappeared because he was in Noreff's way; his father died after being mixed up by the Russian in a plot; and this is the man that they dare not watch over, because he says he has a mission, and they don't want to displease his government; and if I had not insisted so positively, telling them that I expected to prove the identity of the unfortunate woman, they would not even have consented to enbalm the head. I have but one chance left me now, which is to get into Noreff's house in the Rue de Varennes without exciting suspicion. I have leave of absence for a month, and Noreff has never seen my face, or if he ever did see it, it was long ago, and he must have forgotten it. But the difficulty is to find a pretext for entering his house. The scamp must be on his guard." Having thus thought aloud, the detective again became absorbed in his reflections; however, coming to a decision, he once more kissed the portrait, replaced it at the bottom of the casket, then arranging the papers inside and locking them up carefully. Finally, he deposited the casket in a large secretary, the only decent piece of furniture in this poor-looking room.

One document had remained upon the table, and doubtless Jottrat had purposely left it there, for as soon as he had put his treasure safely away he sat down again, beginning to read the paper attentively. It was a sheet of oblong form, covered with rather close handwriting, and at the first glance an administrative report could be recognised. "What can they say?" muttered Jottrat, shrugging his shoulders; "very little, although they use a great many words, probably; besides, if they have given me this, it is no doubt because I shall not be able to find anything out from it," and thereupon he stopped, making a gesture of indifference.

"After all, who knows?" he again suddenly resumed; "they have read it; but there are two ways of reading, and I mistrust theirs."

The report was headed with these words in large letters: "Result of the inquiries respecting the Marquis Roger de Mensignac."

"It is now certain," said the anonymous writer, "that Monsieur de Mensignac is not in Paris, and it is also very probable that he is not dead, as the most minute search has been made; even the Seine has been dragged, but no body has been found at all resembling that of the

marquis. The particulars furnished by his servants do not allow us to suppose that a crime has been committed in his house near the Trocadéro, and the information collected respecting the marquis's antecedents and habits enable one to form some opinion of the probable cause of his disappearance.

"Initiated by his father into the movements of the Legitimists in the West in 1832, he has always been the most active agent of the Duc de Bordeaux's party, and has devoted his fortune to its interests. The family means had already been greatly impaired in a like way by his father, General de Mensignac. For fifteen years the life of the present marquis has been a succession of mysterious absences, sometimes connected with political plots in the provinces, and sometimes with pecuniary embarrassment. Of late he has apparently possessed no fortune. The house near the Trocadéro belongs to his sister, who is about to sell it. It is therefore probable that the marquis, who had a large and pressing payment to make, has absconded and taken refuge in one of the Western provinces. Five years ago his frequent journeys to the shores of Brittany and Normandy were remarked by the authorities, and as he had no apparent interests in that part of France, it is difficult to explain why he went there. However, on this point inquiries may be prosecuted in the departments of Ille-et-Vilaine and La Manche.

"The inquiry opened with the object of finding out if the disappearance of the marquis could in any way be connected with the discovery of the young woman's head in the Bois de Boulogne, has not yielded any result. The woman, moreover, has not been recognised at the Morgue, and she had never met Monsieur de Mensignac, contrary to the statements made by a few persons, who were deceived by a chance resemblance. As for the pocket-book found in the basket that contained the head, it had never been seen in the marquis's possession by any of the persons in his service, and as well as the escutcheon on the cover could be distinguished it was merely a fancy one, but vaguely resembling that of the Mensignac family.

"Beyond his club connections, which had been very limited of late, the marquis did not go into society, and no one knew of his being intimate with any woman. His only friend was the Viscount de Sartilly, who, it is said, was on the point of marrying Mademoiselle Jeanne de Mensignac, when he was grievously wounded in a duel three days after the marquis's disappearance."

"Wounded in a duel!" cried Jottrat, letting the report drop; "ah, that is why I have not heard from him! It is my own fault," he added, with growing agitation. "I ought to have kept myself informed as to all that was going on, instead of hiding myself from Noreff's spies."

Then after a pause he resumed: "Wounded in a duel! And by whom, I wonder?"

However, the report said nothing more on that point, but concluded in this manner: "The severity of Monsieur de Sartilly's wound has not permitted us to question him upon certain points, but he had already given various testimony at the beginning of this affair to the chief of the detective police."

At the moment when Jottrat was finishing the perusal of this sentence, a ring was heard at the door of his room, and the agent, prudently putting the report into his pocket, went to see who was there. A man stood before him, and when the light fell upon the newcomer, Jottrat suppressed an exclamation of surprise. His emotion was so great that he was obliged to

lean for support against the wall. He had recognised Monsieur de Noreff. Yes, the formidable Russian was there, standing on the threshold, and looking as calm as a man coming to pay an ordinary visit. Touching his hat politely, he said, "Monsieur Jottrat, I believe?"

The detective felt that it was important for him to hide his agitation. He did not understand as yet the object of Monsieur de Noreff's visit; but he felt sure that if the Russian ventured to call on him in this manner it was because he thought he was not known to him. So it would be necessary not to show the least astonishment, if he wished to retain the advantage that might result from any mistake made by his adversary. The entry was very badly lighted, and Jottrat hoped that his first emotion had not been noticed by his visitor. Accordingly, again becoming master of himself, he answered, calmly: "Yes, sir," and then with a cordial gesture, he added, "will you have the kindness to come in?"

He had noticed that Monsieur de Noreff's eyes were fixed upon him with disquieting persistency, and he thought it necessary to accentuate his politeness. The Russian thanked him with an inclination of the head, and crossed the humble threshold. The detective having now had ample time to recover himself, was reflecting on the possible reasons and consequences of this unexpected visit. An instant before he had ardently longed to find a pretext for introducing himself into Monsieur de Noreff's house, and now he was brought in contact with him in the most simple manner. This step taken by his enemy might, it is true, have been devised to entrap him, but he relied on his own skill to baffle the Muscovite, and he gazed inquisitively at this man who for fifteen years had played an occult part in his life,—this Russian whom he had never completely lost sight of, and whom a strange chance had again just brought across his path. "He looks older," thought Jottrat, "but his eyes and mouth haven't changed."

Monsieur de Noreff without seeming to notice that Jottrat was examining him, seated himself with perfect composure on one of the dilapidated chairs, and seemed inclined to talk as calmly as if he were receiving the detective in his own drawing-room. "I must tell you, sir," he said, "that having heard your skill highly praised, I desire to have the assistance of your talents in an affair that interests me."

"Excuse me, sir," answered Jottrat, "but before going any further, will you kindly tell me to whom I have the honour of speaking?"

"Of course I will," said Monsieur de Noreff, handing Jottrat a card which bore his name and crest.

This mark of confidence rather astonished Jottrat, who began to think that this visit might have some natural and avowable motive. Assuming a more respectful manner after reading the titles inscribed on the card, he said, with affected embarrassment: "May I ask you another question, sir, before placing myself at your disposal?"

"Certainly, certainly," answered the foreigner, in a benignant tone of voice.

"I wish to know," said Jottrat, looking stealthily at the Russian, "how my name and address have been communicated to you."

"Oh! it is easily explained," replied Noreff, quietly. "I am engaged, at this moment, in a very delicate and confidential inquiry, and needing a skilful and honest man to assist me, I simply went to the prefect of police, and asked him if he would help me in the matter. He thereupon named you."

On hearing this unexpected reply Jottrat asked himself if the Muscovite had really had the audacity to apply to the prefect. If that really were the case it was astonishing that his superiors had given his name ; so fancying that Noreff was simply trying him he decided to ask another question.

"I am really ashamed in thus persisting," he resumed, in the most humble manner he could assume, "but in private matters, when our superiors allow us to act, it is the custom to give a written authorisation, and although I don't in the least doubt——"

"Ah, you are right," interrupted Monsieur de Noreff. "I ought to have thought of that. Probably the prefect did not think of it, on his side. The fact is, I have not brought any authorisation ; however, that can be easily arranged. I will call to-morrow with the proper papers."

Speaking in a tone of perfect indifference, the Russian made a motion as if to about to rise from his chair. Jottrat's perplexity was very great, for were he to allow this desired opportunity of entering the enemy's camp to escape him by letting Noreff go away, everything might be lost, for whether the Muscovite told the truth or lied, he would hardly return to the house of a man who had doubted him. However, on the other hand, the agent did not hide from himself the danger of mingling in the dark intrigues of this Russian scamp ; but it was too late to draw back, and an ardent desire to engage in the struggle conquered all the fear of failure.

"Oh, sir," he said to Monsieur de Noreff, in a contrite tone, "how sorry I am for having expressed myself so badly, in speaking as I did of a written authorisation. I did not mean that it was necessary for this evening. I will myself go to the prefecture to-morrow to do the needful, and I beg of you to believe that from this moment I am quite at your service."

"Very good," said Monsieur de Noreff, in an easy manner, and leaning back again in his chair. "I won't hide from you," he added, "that I would rather not have this affair delayed, as interests are at stake which might be compromised from one day to another."

"I shall be quite willing to act, and in the meanwhile, I am ready to listen," said Jottrat, gaily, having recovered all his composure.

"The prefect spoke to me of the special aptitude you possess for deciphering and explaining secret writings and mysterious indications," said Noreff.

"I have often been employed in work of that kind."

"Then you could find out the meaning of a secret phrase ?"

"All secret ciphers have a key, which is not difficult to discover when a man has time ; as for invisible inks, they are easily found out. I think I could decipher any letter whatever, but it is rather a long operation, and I shall require a day, perhaps, to accomplish it ; but I have here everything that I shall want for the purpose."

"It is not a letter that is in question ; it is a book."

"A book !"

"Yes, and I will tell you how you can be useful to me. One of my nearest relations, very rich and still more eccentric, has just died in Sweden. He had a singular mania for hiding his fortune, and in spite of our watchfulness he succeeded in doing so. We are sure that he hid an enormous sum, and that the indication of the hiding-place is in a book which he pointed out himself ; unfortunately, our information stops there. My brother, who lives in Sweden, has examined all the leaves of the book

with the greatest care, without making any discovery, and he has sent it to me here. I hope to be more fortunate, particularly if you consent to help me."

"Have you any idea of the nature of the indication, or its place in the book?"

"None; but I presume that there is something written in sympathetic ink on one of the margins, or at the bottom of a page; however, I cannot tell, and I absolutely rely on your talent to relieve me from my embarrassment."

The police-agent was reflecting, and he felt sure that this strange story was connected with the fate and fortune of Roger de Mensignac. "Why should I not try to find out the secret," he thought, "the secret which this miserable scamp has just told me about? What would prevent me, if I make the discovery, from hiding it from him, and taking advantage of it to save the wealth of the Mensignac family?" This last hope decided Jottrat. "I think I can positively answer for success," he said, in a confident tone, "and I am ready to begin work this evening, if you will confide the book to me."

"I am delighted to hear that," answered the Russian, joyfully, "and you may depend upon a reward proportionate to your services. Now, if you will do me the favour to come with me in my carriage to my house I will immediately place the book in your possession. You will understand that this volume is too valuable to be removed, and I think that you can examine it as well at my house as here."

Jottrat had not expected this proposal, and he could not help hesitating at the idea of exposing himself, perhaps, to some snare on the part of his enemy. "However, after all," he thought, "this is what I wished for," and opening a drawer, he took out his materials for deciphering, and said, in a firm tone: "I am ready to start, sir."

Five minutes afterwards the Russian and the detective were seated side by side in an elegant brongham, drawn by two superb black horses, which started off at full speed. Monsieur de Noreff, drawing up the windows, remarked: "Excuse me, my dear sir, for shutting you up in this way, but I dread the cold extremely."

The carriage rolled on so rapidly that Jottrat could scarcely distinguish the way they were taking. It was a cold evening, and the brongham was somewhat small, so that the windows were soon covered with vapour which prevented one from taking a good look outside. All that the detective could see was the street lamps, which seemed to flash by like meteors. However, on starting off it had seemed to him that the vehicle had proceeded towards the Seine and had turned along the quays, which was the right direction to Monsieur de Noreff's house, so that there was really no ground for suspicion. Still, being rather inclined to distrust his companion, he wiped off the vapour that obscured the window on his side, and gave a glance into the street. But the fog rising from the river was now so thick that he could not see ten paces off. Monsieur de Noreff, perhaps, remarked Jottrat's proceeding, and possibly he suspected what was passing in his mind, for he spoke to him in a manner calculated to set him fully at his ease: "You are afraid that my coachman may go wrong, my dear sir," he said calmly, "but there is no fear of that. He often drove me about London in worse fogs than this one, and I am convinced that we shall reach our destination safely."

"Besides," observed Jottrat, "we have not very far to go; for, if I

recollect rightly what I read on your card, we are bound for the Boulevard des Invalides, and at the rate your horses trot we must now be near there."

The agent hesitated a little in speaking of the situation of Monsieur de Noreff's house; but the Russian did not appear to remark it, and instead of answering him he started a conversation of a totally different kind. "Have you been very long in the police service, sir?" he asked in an easy tone.

"About sixteen years," answered Jottrat, rather surprised at the question.

"Then you were already in the service when I first arrived in France, in 1832, at the close of the Polish insurrection?"

"I had then belonged to it for a few months."

"Then you must know of the persecution which I was exposed to at that period?"

"Indeed! no, sir," stammered Jottrat, who wondered what Noreff was aiming at.

"Really! The matter was, however, greatly spoken of, and a number of charges were brought against me—such as being a Russian spy, of conspiring against the French government, and many other things respecting which I had a deal of trouble in justifying myself."

"I was not employed in the political police," said Jottrat, whose embarrassment increased as Monsieur de Noreff proceeded with his souvenirs, "so that I knew nothing of this affair."

"But the most curious part of it all was, that politics were only a pretext for persecuting me," replied the Muscovite.

"How was that?"

"Yes, all this story of plotting and secret missions had been arranged by some petty detective, who made war against me for personal reasons. He declared a kind of vendetta against me, just as though he had been in Corsica."

A spell of silence followed this declaration, for Jottrat could not find a word to reply to it.

"And what is still stranger," quietly resumed Monsieur de Noreff, "I did not know the truth until a long time after. Would you believe it, it was only yesterday, on going to the Prefecture of Police, that I obtained an explanation of all the annoyance to which I was subjected in 1832?"

"What! did the prefect tell you?"

"Yes, he did, and he could not have been more gracious. He revealed to me the secret of that affair, which I must confess I had forgotten."

Jottrat, making an effort to appear calm, listened with feverish attention.

"It appears," continued Noreff, "that this man imagined that I had taken his mistress away from him, or carried off his child—I forget exactly which—and, in the hope of finding them again, he had me arrested and my house searched. A singular affair, eh?" added the Muscovite, turning round and glancing at his companion. "Things of that kind can only take place in France. In Russia, any detective who played such a trick upon a nobleman would be sure to die under the knout."

"And what became of the man who slandered you in this way?" asked Jottrat.

"The prefect of police said he had been dismissed by his predecessor, and he did not know what had become of him, no information on the subject having been preserved."

Jottrat heaved a sigh of relief, and answered somewhat more easily : "However guilty the detective may have been, they could only punish him as they did—that is by sending him away. We have neither whips nor Siberia here," he added, with a forced laugh.

"That is true," replied Monsieur de Noreff, gaily ; "but we Russians, when we want to revenge ourselves, know how to invent punishments which are quite as efficacious as exile to Siberia, which is only at the disposal of the Czar. For instance, I myself have a very fertile imagination, and I know suitable means of revenge for all places."

The dimness of the carriage hid Jottrat's pale face, and all that could be seen of Monsieur de Noreff was his white, pointed teeth as he opened his mouth to laugh.

"I am lost," thought the unfortunate detective. "This man knows everything, and he is going to murder me." Strange thoughts passed through his burning brain, and he bitterly reproached himself for his credulity. The vehicle was still proceeding onward at the same swift pace, and the fog was now so intense that nothing whatever of the surroundings could be distinguished. However, they were no longer jolting over rough paving stones, and it seemed to Jottrat that they were rolling along some smooth road. He fancied for a moment that they must be on the Place des Invalides ; but, judging by the horses' pace, they must have gone further than that. The detective could no longer doubt but what he had been entrapped, for reasons that were only too clear ; and while thinking of the fearful death that probably awaited him, his blood curdled in his veins. Although a brave man in every sense of the word, and able to face any peril without flinching—even such a horrible death as that which was probably in store for him—his heart sank at the idea of dying without succeeding in the task to which he had devoted himself. To abandon the hope of finding those he had sought for twenty years, to leave them to the odious Noreff's vengeance was too cruel, and Jottrat could not be resigned to the idea. Moreover, a secret instinct warned him that his life was not merely in danger. His enemy meant, no doubt, to make him take part in some infernal intrigue and then to kill him. He must, at any risk, try to escape.

He at first thought of seizing the Russian by the neck and strangling him, but he reflected that Monsieur de Noreff could not have come upon an expedition of this kind unarmed, and that he, Jottrat, had not even a knife in his pocket. It seemed easier to open the carriage door quietly, to jump out, and run off as fast as his legs would take him. He thought that Noreff would not be agile enough to alight without stopping the carriage and that in the meanwhile he might escape, particularly as the fog was so thick. It was certainly a dangerous operation to jump from a carriage, with the horses going at full speed, but Jottrat had not the choice of means. The Russian, leaning back in his corner, seemed to be gazing at the fog, and the moment seeming propitious to the detective, he began fumbling for the knob of the door, taking care, at the same time, to keep a watch upon Noreff. With his eye upon his terrible companion, and his hand on the brass knob, he collected all his strength, and when he considered that he was well prepared to jump on to the road, he pressed the knob in view of opening the door ; but, instead of yielding to the strong pressure of his hand, it resisted with a noise that made Monsieur de Noreff turn his head.

"It is useless, my dear sir," said the Russian ; "you can't open it ;

the doors of my carriages are fastened with a mechanism of my own invention, and the secret must be known to any person wishing to alight. It is a precaution I have taken against accidents, which often happen when one leans against a door to look out into the street," he added complacently.

Jottratt ground his teeth with rage, but did not answer one word.

"I understand your impatience," Monsieur de Noreff continued; "but be easy; we have arrived."

At this moment the police agent realised that the carriage suddenly turned, and he recognised the grating sound peculiar to wheels passing over fine gravel. A moment later the carriage stopped, and almost at the same time both doors were opened from outside. Through the fog Jottratt could faintly distinguish some dark, motionless figures ranging themselves before the carriage steps. It was he they were lying in wait for, and the snare could no longer be doubted, for the newcomers stationed themselves in such a manner as to bar his passage, with their arms already extended to seize hold of him. There were four of them, and Jottratt thought he could see in the hand of the one nearest the door something like a leather strap or band. The unhappy man fancied from these sinister preparations that the Oriental punishment known as the bowstring was in store for him, and he prepared himself to die.

"Well, my dear sir, you were in such a hurry just now, and yet you don't alight!" said Monsieur de Noreff in a mocking voice. He had already jumped to the ground from the opposite side of the carriage.

"I am coming, you miserable scamp," cried Jottratt, "and will not perish without having crushed you;" and then, precipitating himself from the carriage, he darted upon Monsieur de Noreff. The Russian was probably at ease as to the consequences of the attack, for, not trying to defend himself, he rolled over with the detective. The latter tried to seize him by the throat, but before he had time to do so a call in a foreign tongue brought a reinforcement of four more men, and in a moment Jottratt, seized by vigorous hands, found himself unable to make the slightest movement. The darkness, increased by the fog, was almost complete. He did not see his adversaries, but he felt their strong grip, and heard Noreff's voice giving orders, still in an unknown tongue. "I am going to die," thought the unhappy man, and he ceased to resist. He now experienced mental suffering a thousand times more cruel than the most barbarous treatment he could receive. The image of his lost son, whom now he could not hope to see again, rose up before him as if reproaching him for his imprudence. "I might have saved him, perhaps," he thought, bitterly, "and now, owing to my foolish confidence, he will always remain in the power of the scoundrels who kidnapped him."

The odious contact of the hirelings who held him did not draw from him a word of complaint. He felt them tying his arms and legs with ropes, bandaging his eyes with a handkerchief, and applying a large leathern gag to his mouth; and it was all performed with a dexterity and speed which bespoke long practice in similar acts of violence. Jottratt could neither speak nor see. However, he breathed freely, and was not injured.

His first idea returned to him; he said to himself they were no doubt reserving him for some slow punishment, and were about to remove him to some lighted spot. All these precautions would have been useless if the crime were to be committed on deserted ground. This reflection lent him more composure, and even gave him a slight ray of hope. However



perilous his situation might be, he might perhaps be able to use the observing faculties with which nature had endowed him to advantage. It is true that he was unable to avail himself of that most precious faculty—sight; still his other senses were left him. To begin with, he had guessed aright, for he felt himself raised up by his feet and head and carried away. In addition to the heavy tread of his bearers, he heard Noreff's lighter footfall, and remarked that the carriage had not moved. If it still remained there it must be waiting for its owner; so they were not near Noreff's house in the Rue de Varennes, or the coachman would have at once driven the horses to the stable. The gravel grating beneath the feet of the bearers, a perfume of shrubs and flowers, a branch which brushed against his cheeks, the flutter of a bird flying off, all convinced him that he was being carried across some garden.

Soon his bearers stopped, and he heard the noise of a large key turning in a rusty lock, followed almost immediately by the grinding of a heavy door turning on its hinges. On the way Jottrat had had the presence of mind to count Monsieur de Noreff's footsteps—some three score or so—and adding them to the distance traversed by the carriage after turning out of the street, he had been conveyed, in one way or another, fully a hundred yards; so the garden was one of considerable extent. However, as the door was opened, the porters moved on without stopping a moment, and Jottrat concluded that the place must have been already lighted up. Soon he perceived that he was descending, as his head was higher than his feet. This was becoming really frightful. To what tomb were they conducting him? Were they going to bury him alive in some dungeon, and leave him there to die of hunger? A feeling of physical fear took possession of the unhappy man, and he felt a shudder of horror, even to the roots of his hair. However, the bearers still descended, and the air grew damp and heavy, impregnated with that musty smell peculiar to cellars. Now and then a few drops of water fell on the detective's face, and he surmised that they had fallen from some vaulted roof. He remarked, too, that the men carrying him frequently turned, and that Monsieur de Noreff was still following. Every now and then the porters stopped to rest, and finally, by their jerky motion, he realised that he was being carried down some steps. In spite of his sufferings he had the presence of mind to count twenty-two of them; on the twenty-third they stopped, and for the first time since the start, he heard Monsieur de Noreff's voice giving an order, still in a strange language. "'Tis my sentence of death," he thought, "and we must have reached the door of the cell where I shall be left to perish." He expected to hear the noise of a key, but he only heard a faint sound, as of some wood sliding, and he fancied that he was about to be placed in some dungeon entered by means of a panel sliding back in the wainscoting. At the same time he felt himself being placed in a very large chair, which, an instant afterwards, was raised by some invisible force, balanced in the air, and suddenly lowered by means of machinery. A slight shock apprised him of the fact that the chair had touched either the ground or a flooring; and then a voice, in French, called to him from above, "Get up and walk."

Jottrat obeyed mechanically, at least as well as he could; he stood up, but he could not take a step on account of the ropes that bound his legs. Then an almost imperceptible noise of wheels and pulleys warned him that the chair had been hoisted up again. Now without doubt it was all over, as they must be about to seal up the sepulchre in which they had placed him.

The unfortunate fellow could not even dream of escape as some prisoners do. How can one attempt flight when one cannot see, or move, or call? His fate seemed more horrible than anything he had dreamed of, and he began to ask himself if there were not some hidden motive in all this. He could not understand why he was not killed at once, or if he were condemned to die by degrees of hunger, why he was left in bonds which could only hasten his death. All was silent around him. He did not even hear any sound of the trap closing, or of his persecutors hurrying away. The scoundrels seemed to have vanished by enchantment. The atmosphere he breathed was warm, but he did not feel the slightest puff of air. All was smooth beneath his feet. It seemed as if he had been lowered into some desolate void. So great was his despair that he no longer tried to struggle against his destiny. He sank down, stretching himself on the spot where he had risen from the arm-chair. The cords that bound him were terribly irksome, and he could feel that his legs were beginning to swell. The gag hindered his breathing, and the thought that suffocation might soon super-vene consoled him. In fact, he tried to hasten death by holding his breath, and turning his face downwards; but he only succeeded in bringing about a sort of torpor which was neither sleep nor a fainting fit. He had no idea how long he remained in this condition. He thought at times that he felt hands touching him, but he remembered nothing more until the sound of a voice struck his ear.

"Take off your gag, and remove the bandage from your eyes," cried the person who had already ordered him to rise from the chair.

Jottrat then suddenly realised that his limbs had been set free. With a bound he rose to his feet, and with trembling hands removed the leathern gag from before his mouth.

"Take the bandage off your eyes and look around you," again said the voice, which seemed to come from above.

When he took the bandage off, he was at first so dazed, and the light that met his eyes caused them such pain, that he could see nothing. After a while, however, he was able to look about him, and perceived that he was in a square room, with walls coated with polished stucco, which took away all appearance of a dungeon. The apartment might have been likened to a room in a hotel in some southern town; the ceiling, it is true, was vaulted, but the furniture was tolerably comfortable. A simple iron bedstead, of irreproachable cleanliness, stood in one corner of the room; some arm-chairs were ranged along the walls, a walnut wardrobe stood at the further end, and in a corner opposite the bed there was a table covered with writing materials. Two lamps hanging from the vaulted ceiling lighted this odd apartment, which resembled rather a student's or a grisette's lodging than a prison. A light dinner properly served on a little round table completed the illusion. Jottrat's astonishment was so great that he remained motionless, asking himself if he were not dreaming. However, the voice from above recalled him to the reality of the situation. "Good-night," cried his unknown jailer, "you are at home; sleep well!"

Then before he had time to raise his head, a slight click apprised him of the fact that the trap-door had been closed; he could not even distinguish it when he looked up at the vaulted ceiling. Thus caught in a snare, the detective resolved to make the tour of his prison; however, he began walking about with hesitation, and could not help feeling a superstitious fear, for it seemed to him at each instant that he might set his foot on a trap-door, and be engulfed. In vain did he feel and sound the walls

all round the room; there was no visible outlet, the walls were as smooth as china, and it seemed evident that this odd room could only be entered by the vaulted ceiling, where some opening must exist, together with some complicated machinery. The ceiling, by the way, was at a great height, and Jottrat could only distinguish it imperfectly. So he resolved to postpone all further search until it was daylight. But did daylight ever dawn in this seemingly subterranean prison? As the detective looked up it seemed to him that he could distinguish in the higher part of the wall opposite to him a long slit covered with glass. The thought that perhaps this tomb had a window, an outlet, then struck Jottrat, and he muttered to himself, "I will escape in that direction."

He had examined the polished walls, the flooring of bitumen, and the gloomy vault overhead, and it now remained for him to inspect the furniture. He found that the wardrobe contained some of the necessities of life—notably a filter; while on some shelves there was some table and bed linen, some wine, sugar, liqueurs, even a tobacco pot, and also a box of cigars. The bed resembled those seen in hospitals, and Jottrat, worn out with fatigue and exhausted by emotion, threw himself upon it without undressing, and soon fell into a heavy, dreamless, almost lethargic sleep that lasted nearly twelve hours.

When he awoke in the morning the scene had changed; the lamps were no longer there; a faint ray of daylight penetrated into the vault, and Jottrat realised with delight he was not entirely buried, since he could see the sunshine, the sunshine that brightened joyous villages and gay fields. It seemed to him this furtive sun-ray connected him with the world outside. Rising from the bed, he tried to account for this un hoped-for light, and found that he had not been deceived on the night before—the window of which he had suspected the existence was really there, but it was at so great a height that even by piling all the furniture piece upon piece it would be impossible to reach it. Indeed, the apartment was certainly thirty feet high. The panes were of ground glass, and two small square apertures had been left to admit air from the outside. The enormous distance from the floor to the ceiling explained the absence of a grating before this singular window. It had not been barricaded, as it was inaccessible.

Nothing else had changed during the night; on the round table there still stood the food that had been prepared for him, and feeling extremely hungry, he sat down and breakfasted. This meal restored his bodily strength and his activity of mind, and rising up he again began making the tour of his room, with the perseverance of a prisoner seeking some means of escape. Suddenly he was surprised to see that a large bound book was lying on the table opposite his bed. The presence of this volume explained both the precautions taken to prevent his flight and also the care to provide for his subsistence. Noreff, no doubt, meant to keep him a prisoner until he had found and revealed the precious secret contained in this book. So his life would be spared for a while; though, on the other hand, there would be nothing to shield him when once he had communicated the secret to his enemy. In fact, the Russian would have an interest in getting rid of him to prevent him from revealing what had taken place. Thus reflecting he sat down at the table on which the book was lying, and impelled rather by a feeling of curiosity than by any desire to obey Monsieur de Noreff, he opened it.

The title—"History of the Province of Normandy"—was printed on

the first page in large letters, alternately red and black, according to the fashion of the seventeenth century. It seemed to him rather singular that the book in which a Swede had hidden the secret of his future should happen to be an odd volume of a French work. However, a vague presentiment warned him that this book might hide a very different mystery, and he surmised that there might be some connection between this History of Normandy and the Marquis de Mensignac's frequent journeys.

He was slowly turning over the leaves, when a half-effaced mark attracted his attention; it was a coat of arms stamped at the bottom of a page. Jottrat eagerly scanned these armorial bearings, but they did not furnish him with any clue. His heraldic knowledge was too slight for him to recognise the Mensignac arms, although he thought he had previously seen the chevron in the centre of the escutcheon. He paused, absorbed in thought, and was leaning his head upon his hands, when a slight noise made him turn. He could not restrain a cry of surprise, for Monsieur de Noreff stood before him, calm and smiling with that false smile which was habitual to him.

"'Tis I, my dear sir," said the Muscovite, sitting down with an air of perfect ease; "shall we have a little chat together?" Jottrat's astonishment was so great that he could not answer. "However, first of all," continued Monsieur de Noreff, "let me ask you how you like the lodging I have prepared for you?"

The detective's surprise now changed into stupefaction.

"I should be grieved if it were not to your taste—especially if your sojourn here were prolonged; but I will do all I can to make you comfortable," added the Muscovite.

Jottrat, stunned by so much audacity, still remained silent.

"Ah, ah!" began the Russian, still imperturbable, "I am pleased to see that you have found a means of employing your time;" and pointing to the book upon the table he added, "you see that I did not deceive you, and that I really need the help of your talents to discover the secret which my cousin in Sweden was foolish enough to hide in that volume."

On hearing this the detective sprang to his feet. All his previous suspicions respecting the book returned to him.

"My talents," he said, in a ringing voice, "are not at your service; and I would not tell you the secret you wish to find out, even if I discovered it."

"Really!" replied the Russian, with affected surprise. "Allow me to tell you that would be a poor return for my hospitality." Jottrat smiled contemptuously. "Your refusal," continued Monsieur de Noreff, "would have another inconvenience; that of prolonging your sojourn here—indefinitely."

"I am ready to die!"

"To die, my dear friend! and why? In order to hide the will of a fool who wished to deprive his heirs of the wealth that ought to come to them?"

These words were said in a tone which might have deceived any other person than the detective. But the past was always in his mind.

"Let us put an end to this farce," he said, firmly; "you won't presume to tell me that your minions tied and gagged, and threw me into a dungeon to do honest work!"

"A dungeon, my dear sir; you are very severe upon this study. It is a little dark, I must confess, but so quiet."

"When you came to my house," replied Jottrat, without replying to

this odious banter, "I believed in the sincerity of your intentions, and went off with you without even knowing where you meant to take me. But you acted like a kidnapper, and I presume you had a motive in doing so—a motive I can partially guess, though I wish to be certain upon the point before answering you."

"You have guessed my motives? By my faith, you will oblige me by letting me know what your suppositions are!"

"Ah, this is too much! You don't seem to understand that I have been too often near death to fear it." And as Monsieur de Noreff persisted in his disdainful silence, Jottrat stood up before him, and looking him steadily in the face, began in a calm voice: "Listen to me; if you have come here to enjoy the sight of my grief, you can have the pleasure of witnessing it; but I warn you that you will neither draw a complaint nor an answer from me; if you want anything else, speak, and I will tell you whether I consent to serve you; you see that I am playing fair."

Rather a long pause ensued. Jottrat sat down, his face assuming its usual impassive expression, while Monsieur de Noreff observed him with a malicious look, and seemed to be reflecting. The Muscovite realised that the time for banter had gone by, and that if he wished to obtain anything from his prisoner he must make a direct attack.

"I believe, my dear sir, that you are right," he said at last, "and, to use your expression, I also desire fair play."

Jottrat was listening with cold attention. "Well," Monsieur de Noreff continued, "I will admit that I did not use a vague pretext to bring you here. I have not enough imagination to invent a story of a treasure, the whereabouts of which might be discovered by means of a book. So what I told you was not fiction but fact. The volume is there before you, and really contains the indication I spoke of. I sincerely hope, with your help, to find it; and I again repeat that I will not haggle over your reward."

While saying these last words, Noreff watched Jottrat stealthily; but the expression of the detective's face was so disdainful and indifferent that he changed his batteries immediately. "The reward I expect to give you for this service is nothing by the side of what I can offer you if you can aid me in another matter, for I expect something else from you."

"And what else do you expect from me?" asked Jottrat, departing, in spite of himself, from his silent reserve, for so much audacity confounded and revolted him.

Monsieur de Noreff paused some time before answering, like an actor preparing an effect, and when he felt sure he had sufficiently awakened the curiosity of his prisoner, he began again in a low voice: "Do you recollect, my dear sir, what happened at Havre on the 24th of May, 1830?"

Jottrat turned frightfully pale, and carried his hand to his breast with the gesture of a man who had been struck a violent blow; a veil seemed to come before his eyes, and his lips opened convulsively, uttering a few incoherent words; while the Russian, keeping his eyes fixed upon his victim, seemed to enjoy his torture. Suddenly, however, the detective bounded forward with closed teeth, clenched hands, and haggard eyes, his whole appearance being so alarming that Noreff rose up and started back a few steps.

"Ah, you miserable scamp! you acknowledge, then, that you stole my son!" cried Jottrat, "and you dare to confess it when you are alone with me and I can strangle you with my hands!"

While thus speaking, he dashed towards his enemy with extended arms and rage in his eyes. The Russian did not retreat, however, but drawing a whistle from his pocket, he blew it hastily three times ; a slight sound then made Jottrat raise his head, and he saw the trap-door open in the vaulted ceiling, and the barrels of two guns pass into the room.

"You see, my dear sir, I had taken my precautions in case you should become violent," said Monsieur de Noreff. "So pray don't indulge in this display, as it would be of no use, but simply put me under the painful necessity of whistling again."

Jottrat, however, continued to draw nearer in the same menacing manner, and the Russian, understanding that the fear of death would have no effect upon the exasperated man, hastened to speak some words which, with infernal skill, he had held in reserve : "Then you do not desire to have some news of your son ?"

This perfidious phrase fell upon Jottrat's anger like a douche of cold water ; for he started back, leaning against a chair to support himself, and bursting into tears. Monsieur de Noreff, satisfied with the effect he had produced, waited quietly until this burst of grief was over, and in the meantime having given a signal, with the result that the trap door closed, he sat down in an arm-chair opposite his prisoner.

The moment had come for him to prosecute his attack, and this time it was in a tone of benevolent sincerity that he resumed his operations : "Come," he said to the unhappy man, "I can understand your grief, and even your anger ; but I cannot understand why you refuse to listen to my proposals."

Jottrat shook his head sadly, as if wishing to express that he cared for nothing that did not relate to his lost child.

"I alluded just now to a very painful event," resumed Monsieur de Noreff, "and your anger was so great that you wanted to kill me ; an instant after, on offering to give you some information of your son, you burst into tears."

"How do you know that I have a son ?" asked Jottrat, looking up.

"What does that matter, if I can tell you what has become of him ?"

"Will you tell me without conditions ?"

"My dear sir, you cannot expect that."

"Then, first of all, I wish to know the value of the information you have to furnish me ?"

"In other terms, you think I have lied, and want to make you purchase a secret which I do not possess ?"

"That is really my opinion."

"And it seems to me reasonable enough," said Noreff, with a coldness that visibly impressed his questions.

Jottrat had expected an explosion of anger, or at least an angry refusal to answer ; but he found an adversary determined to retain his calmness.

"We both of us," continued the Russian, "have an equal interest in explaining ourselves freely before making a bargain. You wish to be sure that I can put you in the way of finding your son. I want to convince you that I have the power of doing so, because I need you ; and because it is the only means of making you enter into my views. Have I guessed aright ?" he asked, looking steadily at Jottrat.

"Very nearly."

"Well, then, I will tell you a little story, which will convince you of

my sincerity. I suppose that you won't require me to tell you how and where I obtained my information?"

"Merely prove to me that you know where my son is, and then I will consider what I ought to do."

"Very good. I begin to hope that we shall arrive at an understanding."

"I am waiting," said Jottrat, impatiently.

"Oh! I am ready to begin, only I am obliged to start at a distant date," replied Monsieur de Noreff. "Some twenty-two years ago, towards the end of 1824, a tall and handsome young man, who had served in the 8th Hussars, returned to the village where he was born. He had capital certificates; he had become a quarter-master during his term of service, and might have become an officer had he chosen. However, he preferred to return home."

Jottrat was listening attentively, and the Muscovite looked at him with an air of satisfaction. "Well," said he, "this young man had received an excellent education; for his father, before the Revolution, had been a professor of mathematics at a college, and had brought up the only child left to him with great care. Near the village there was a large country seat, the owner of which, a man of high birth and possessed of a large fortune, had two sons and a daughter. These two sons, during their vacation, took lessons from the modest old professor, who had retired to live in the neighbouring village, and the daughter was being brought up by an English governess."

After this phrase Monsieur de Noreff paused and glanced at the unhappy Jottrat, who had become visibly paler.

"I said an English governess," the Muscovite resumed, in the same calm manner; "but I was somewhat wrong, as Miss Susan was born in Glasgow, Scotland. In telling a story it is always as well to be exact."

Jottrat had now turned livid, and large drops of perspiration had gathered on his forehead. He had experienced keen emotion on hearing the name of the governess to whom Monsieur de Noreff was referring.

"This Scotch girl was very beautiful—was even charming. She was the daughter of a Presbyterian clergyman, who had no fortune, and she had been educated to become a governess. However, her mild and angelic manner hid unbounded ambition and ardent passions."

On hearing this Jottrat was seized with a nervous trembling, and a cloud gathered before his eyes.

"I won't insist on these matters," resumed Monsieur de Noreff, "for I see they are painful to you, and besides, this part of my story is not essential. However, the old professor being ill one day, sent his son to take his place, and the young fellow fell passionately in love with the fascinating Scotch girl. Did she love him also? He alone could answer this question; at all events, she did not discourage him; and three months afterwards, when he offered his hand, he was accepted. His father, dying in the interval, had left him small but sufficient means, and in the spring of 1825 they were married, and took a wedding-trip to Paris."

The Russian, looking stealthily at Jottrat, saw that he was weeping, and felt that the moment had come to bring his narrative to a climax.

"The Scotch girl had never seen a capital city before, as she had gone straight from boarding-school to the château of—I think I have forgotten its name—and she had no idea of the luxury and gaiety of the city where her husband had had the imprudence to take her. The perverse instincts

slumbering in her heart and mind were awakened by that brief stay in Paris, and when the young couple returned to their quiet village home, Susan swore to herself that she would some day be rich and powerful. A few months after her return she gave birth to a son, who was called Henry, and whom the husband adored. However, strange to say, the mother did not love her little child. She refused to nurse him, and indeed the little care she took of him caused the first misunderstanding in the household."

Jottrat's trouble increased visibly, and each time Monsieur de Noreff stopped for a moment, as if to ask, "Am I right?" the unhappy man gave a gesture of assent without speaking.

"Henry was four years old," resumed the Muscovite, "and his father, proud and happy, did not notice that Susan no longer loved either her child or him, even supposing that she ever had loved him."

Jottrat was now sobbing in such a heartrending manner that Monsieur de Noreff was constrained to pause. When he was at last able to resume his story he thought it best to deal at once with brutal facts.

"At the end of the month of May, 1830," he said, "Susan wished to go to Havre under the pretext that the sea air was necessary for her health, and her husband, who could never refuse her requests, took her there. There was at that time in the port a Russian ship, the captain of which—the son of a wealthy merchant of Riga—astonished all Havre by his eccentric habits and prodigality. He had remarked Susan on the pier, and with the audacity which is a characteristic of his race he wrote to her, and proposed to her to elope with him. The Scotchwoman thought the occasion a good one to throw off her mask of hypocrisy. One evening she went out with her son and never came back. Her husband, crazy with anxiety and grief, remained up all night expecting her, and the next morning, at the moment when he was going to the police-office, a letter was handed to him containing merely these words: 'I have left you—forget me.'"

"How do you know that?" asked Jottrat, bounding from his chair.

"I will explain it to you immediately," resumed Monsieur de Noreff; "but I must first of all speak about young Henry, who, I suppose, interests you more than anything else that I can have to tell. He had disappeared with his mother, and yet it was hardly likely that she had thought of embarrassing herself with a child in her flight, especially as she did not love this child. However, the deserted husband made numerous inquiries without any satisfactory result. The ship left in the night, and as it never arrived at Riga it was supposed it had been lost, and that the guilty wife and her lover had been drowned. However, this was never proved; and since then seventeen years have elapsed and the father is still seeking for his lost son."

Jottrat now rose, and, looking steadily at Monsieur de Noreff, he said slowly: "Then you acknowledge that you carried off my wife and son?"

"I acknowledge nothing, my dear sir; and I have only wished to show you that I am well informed on the subject. You must now realise that my proposition is a serious one, and if you are agreeable we will settle our conditions."

"Where is my son?"

"What good would it do you to know that before leaving here?"

"And what must I do to get out of this place?"

"Ah! you see, my dear sir, one must always end by talking seriously,



We should have done better had we begun by that ; but now we can make up for lost time."

"Enough ! What do you want me to do ?"

"Nothing but what you can do without in any wise compromising yourself."

"What is it ?"

"First of all, to find the secret hidden in that book, and afterwards to serve me instead of serving my enemies."

"I don't understand you."

"I will explain matters to you, then ; but, before doing so, permit me to return to my story at the point where I left off, you will see that it is the best way to make you understand our situation. I stopped, I believe, at the moment when the poor husband, bereft of his wife and son, vowed everlasting hatred against the woman who had so unworthily betrayed him, hatred which is, perhaps, not yet extinguished."

A flash darted from Jottrat's eyes, but he said nothing, and the Russian quietly resumed : "This man was madly fond of his son, and, in order to find him, he resolved to sacrifice his fortune. He began by spending all he possessed in fruitless searches, and when the money had gone he chose a profession which would enable him to continue his task. As he could not employ detectives any longer, he resolved to become a detective himself."

"Do you reproach him for doing so ?" asked Jottrat, with a contemptuous smile ; "you, who were born in Sweden, and are a Russian spy !"

"The missions I am charged with have nothing to do with the affair I am speaking of," answered Monsieur de Noreff coldly. "This man, I say, entered the public service ; he was active, intelligent, better educated than most men of his class, and he rapidly obtained advancement. Thus, in 1832, it happened that he was promoted to a post of confidence, and ordered to watch a foreigner who was suspected of being a dangerous conspirator."

"No, no ! the foreigner didn't conspire," interrupted Jottrat ; "he merely sold the secrets of a few poor exiles, that's all !"

"However that may be," resumed Monsieur de Noreff, with imperturbable calmness, "the detective's object in denouncing this foreigner was to serve his personal interests, for he believed that this foreigner was the man who had carried off his wife and child."

"He believed it then, and to-day he is certain of it," said Jottrat, firmly.

"Then he is mistaken. In 1832 he attacked the only man who was in a position to restore his child to him, and now he slanders him instead of listening to him." Monsieur de Noreff spoke so frankly that the detective felt impressed. "In 1832," resumed the Russian, "the detective made a great mistake, and he seems fated to blunder. Even now he hates this foreigner who holds the key of the secret he has been trying to unravel all his life, and instead of asking him for help or information he tries to wring from him by force the word that shall enable him to find his son again."

"By force ! Which of us employs force, I should like to know ?" asked Jottrat.

"And which of us two lent himself to an infamous accusation, an act of iniquity, a month ago ?" retorted Monsieur de Noreff.

"I did my duty," replied the detective, astonished by so much audacity,

"Was it also your duty that led you to offer your services to my enemy, that Monsieur de Sartilly, whom you were waiting for when I called upon you?"

Jottrat was amazed for a moment, and wondered how Monsieur de Noreff had obtained his information; but suddenly he remembered Toby's sudden appearance while he was conferring with the Viscount de Sartilly in the latter's room. The young groom was evidently one of the Russian's spies.

"Yes," now resumed Monsieur de Noreff, "you act against me, who am in a position to enable you to find your son, and you serve the people who stole him from you."

"That is a lie!" cried Jottrat. "Monsieur de Sartilly could not have stolen my son—he himself was a child in 1830."

"I am not referring to him personally but to his friends—to the General Adhémar de Mensignac, the father of the young marquis who has disappeared—so it is said."

"General de Mensignac!" repeated Jottrat in amazement; "but why should he have stolen my son?"

"He did not take your son, but he carried off your wife. She disappeared, remember, on the 24th of May, 1830. You yourself believed, and it was the common rumour at Havre, that she had eloped with the Russian captain I spoke of; but that was not true. I will tell you what occurred. You have not forgotten that she had gone out with her child to take a long walk on the heights of Ingouville; however, that was only a pretext to join the general, whom she had frequently met during the previous month. That day the general had a post-chaise waiting for her. He was tired, he said, of furtive meetings. He offered her wealth, luxury, life in Paris, and swore eternal love. She, miserable woman, consented to go with him; but her son was with her, and she neither wished to take him nor send him back to his father, as he would have told the story. Then this man and woman between them decided to commit a very infamous action. There was in the port at that time a Russian vessel that was to sail the same night. General de Mensignac knew the captain, and had even made him the confidant of his intrigue with Susan. The two lovers went to pay the captain a visit on board his ship, proposed to him to take the child with him, and he consented."

On hearing this, Jottrat made a threatening gesture; but Monsieur de Noreff quietly resumed: "The captain did not know the father of the child; they told him that this father was a monster, incapable of bringing up his son. The captain believed the statement, consented to take the child, and his ship, the 'Voronège,' sailed the same night, whilst Susan and the general were driving at full speed towards Paris. Do you think now that I have told you the truth?" asked Noreff, in a mild voice.

"No; for you told me that the 'Voronège' had been wrecked; but you commanded it, and you are still living."

"I said that the 'Voronège' had never returned to Riga, which is a very different thing."

"Was it the man's or woman's idea to take the child to the ship?"

"The man's. Susan neither knew the ship, nor the captain."

"Very well; now tell me where my son is, and I'll be yours body and soul."

"But, my dear sir, you do not know what service I wish to ask of you," began the Russian again, in a bantering tone of voice,

"And do you think I have not divined it?" cried Jottrat; "do you think I do not know the enemy whom you wish me to act against?"

"If you know him," said Monsieur de Noreff, calmly, "you must be convinced that your interests and mine are the same, and I am sure that you will not hesitate to help me to avenge our wrongs."

"First tell me where my son is?"

"If I were to tell you now, what guarantee should I have that you would keep your promise, and that you would not, on leaving here, tell all my secrets to Monsieur de Sartilly?"

"My word!" said Jottrat, in a tone which would have convinced any other person than Monsieur de Noreff.

"An excellent guarantee, but I know a better one."

"What is it?"

"Why, wait until you leave here to conclude our bargain. Begin by examining that book. Ferret out the secret it contains, and when you have done that I will at once set you free. You can then quietly return home, and a day or two later, when you have had time to reflect, I will offer you a bargain—your son against your help in a scheme of mine. You shall see Henry on the day you consent to assist me. In the meanwhile we shall neither of us have anything to fear. You have not compromised yourself, and I feel sure that you won't say anything about this vault. Besides, you wouldn't be believed. People would take you for a madman."

"I accept your offer," said Jottrat, "and I have only one more question to ask you."

"What is it?"

"Why did you hate this man who robbed me of my son? He was your friend, and he is dead, and yet you pursue his family with your vengeance!"

"Ah, ah!" said Monsieur de Noreff, with a forced laugh, "it is because he deprived me of something also; he stole from me the heart of the only woman that I ever loved. Yes, the general was a Lovelace, as the saying goes, and he thought it a simple matter to betray a friend and rob him of his happiness."

These words were spoken with such an air of sadness, that Jottrat really began to believe in the Muscovite's sincerity.

"If you do not deceive me," said he, "if the marquis was really the man who robbed me of my son, I vow to you that I will revenge myself on his family, since I can no longer revenge myself on him."

Monsieur de Noreff's eyes sparkled with joy, but it was merely a flash, and his face immediately regained its usual expression. "And I," he said, in his turn, "I swear to you that if you serve me truly I will forget that you were my enemy, and I will give you back your child." Thus speaking, the Muscovite rose up, holding out his hand to Jottrat with so frank a gesture that the detective took it and pressed it in his own.

"And now I am going to leave you," said Noreff, in the most cordial manner, "and I hope that at my next visit we shall go out of this room together, for I acknowledge that it isn't a very agreeable abode."

"Why did you bring me here?" asked Jottrat, whose suspicions were again aroused as he thought of the strange tactics that Monsieur de Noreff had used, and the precautions that he still took.

"Could I have imagined," retorted the Russian, without the least sign of embarrassment, "that we should have come to an understanding so

quickly, when you have been my enemy for fifteen years—my inveterate enemy? Moreover, I knew that quite recently you had allied yourself with a man who accused me of murder. I was also aware of your intelligence and energy, and I am candid enough to tell you that I had determined to lay a snare for you. Yes, I had determined to try and persuade you to join me, and if I did not succeed, to make it impossible for you to injure me; and as I expect to leave France very soon, never to return, you would have been set free after my departure."

All this was said with an air of frankness calculated to inspire confidence in the most suspicious mind. Jottrat, conquered by paternal love, longing to see his son, whom this man promised to restore to him, was no longer the wary, circumspect detective of yore. Paternal love had made him credulous, and as he listened he believed. Monsieur de Neroff, perceiving perfectly well the effect he had produced, finished the conquest of his prisoner by a masterly stroke:

"I came here," he said, with a frank laugh, "after the fashion of traitors in a melodrama, and I confess that this old place is worked like the scenes of a theatre; but now it is useless for me to hide from you the very simple mechanism that enables me to enter and leave." While speaking in this manner, he deliberately walked to the large wardrobe at the end of the room, and touching a spring hidden in the woodwork, moved a panel that concealed an opening. "You see that I renounce all mysteries," he said, while slipping out by this opening, which was just high and wide enough to let a man pass. Jottrat, who had closely followed him, then caught a glimpse of some stone steps.

"This is the grand entrance," continued the Russian; "and it is by this way that I shall come to see you to-morrow. In the meantime, I'll see that you want for nothing, and I hope you will discover the great secret of the book to-night. While you are looking for it, remember that you are working against our common enemy," he added, pressing Jottrat's hand a second time.

Then the panel slipped back into its grooves, and the detective remained alone.

## X.

### A SWIM FOR LIFE.

FOR the first time since the outset of the interview which had just taken place Jottrat could reflect with a free mind, and he began walking up and down, arranging in his memory the very unexpected revelations he had just heard. Now no longer subjected to the allurements and surprises of a conversation every word of which had been calculated with infernal skill, it seemed to him that Monsieur de Neroff's statements were rather suspicious; there were several obscure points, unexplained facts, and evident contradictions in them, and yet they undoubtedly had a strong basis of truth. Susan and her son must have been carried off just as Neroff had said, for the information received from St. Petersburg some time afterwards had proved that little Henry had not been taken to Russia. Neroff's statements respecting the share taken in the guilty business by General de Mensignac—who in his time had been a notorious gay Lothario—would

explain everything; and the detective regretted that he had never watched the Mensignacs.

"Who knows if there is not yet time to do so," he said to himself, recalling certain allusions made by Noreff. "Yes, that mysterious connection between the general's son and the Russian, those enormous sums paid without any known cause, all those matters must have been connected with a crime—some crime committed long ago, and which bound them together—and the crime I can guess it. Noreff was the elder Mensignac's accomplice, and wanting to rid himself of a responsibility that weighed upon him, he has told me who was the prime mover in the abduction, because he knew I should pursue the family with my vengeance. Well, be it so! If the man who carried off Henry was the Marquis de Mensignac, even if his son be the friend of Monsieur de Sartilly, what does it matter? I must find my child, and be revenged."

While Jottrat was in this state of excitement, his eyes suddenly fell on the book which had remained open upon the table, and remembering Monsieur de Noreff's last words, he thought he could not do better than begin searching for the secret information. As the Russian had said, that was tantamount to opening the campaign against the enemy; and in this first moment of enthusiasm, Jottrat went so far as to hope that on one of the leaves of this book he might decipher some information about his son, or at least find proof of his existence. He began his work with feverish ardour, and with full hopes of being successful, for he was past master in the art of reading ciphers, and detecting secret signs. As for sympathetic inks, he knew very well how to make them show up. So, with a magnifying glass in his hand, he set to work, scanning page after page and sentence after sentence. The book, of quarto form, comprised more than 400 pages, and Jottrat examined two-thirds of it without discovering the slightest sign of the secret he wished to solve. The paper was immaculate, without a stain or mark, and it was evident enough that there was no occasion to resort to chemistry. The work so far had occupied a great many hours, and Jottrat had become so absorbed in his task that he had failed to perceive how fast the time was passing, until when daylight began to wane he felt the need of rest and refreshment.

Nothing had been changed in the vault since Monsieur de Noreff had left; but the remains of the breakfast sufficed to satisfy Jottrat's appetite, and after taking his meal with the heedless promptitude of a preoccupied man, he began walking round his prison. He oft-times glanced up at the window, wondering what outlook could be obtained from it. Judging by the sun-rays it faced the south, but it was certainly not on a level with any road or street, or else some inquisitive passers-by would have looked in. He began to think that Monsieur de Noreff must have carried him farther away than he had at first imagined; that he was not in Paris, and that his prison was situated on some lonely hillside. However, while he walked about he heard a strange, murmuring noise, which gradually seemed to increase; it resembled a continuous regular movement, and was interrupted from time to time by a louder sound as if some heavy mass impelled with immense force were beating against the wall of the vault. Then the more distant buzzing noise began again, similar to the nocturnal rumble of vehicles which is the breath of sleeping Paris.

Jottrat had not at first paid any attention to this rumbling—which on his arrival in the vault had not been very distinct, though it now seemed to be drawing nearer—and while trying to divine the cause of it, he was

seized by a vague anxiety. The day was waning, the last rays of the setting sun, gilding the upper part of the window, were gradually dying away, and at the same time it seemed as if the glass were darkened from the outside by some opaque mass that intercepted the light. While reflecting on this singular phenomenon, Jottrat suddenly started back, uttering an exclamation of surprise and terror. "The Seine!—it is the Seine!" he cried. And, indeed, some water had just penetrated by the two square apertures and fallen on to the floor of the room.

Impelled, without doubt, by a violent wind, the river had passed above the level of the window, but it was not probable that the mishap would occur again. This partial inundation was, however, sufficient to make the prisoner understand the situation of his dungeon. The immediate neighbourhood of the river explained everything. The window was situated on one of the banks of the Seine, and could only be seen by a boat, or from the opposite shore, and the low rumbling sound was produced by the current, which was probably very rapid at that point. Jottrat, astonished at not having made this discovery sooner, began making conjectures on the probable situation of his prison. As the window evidently faced the south, he must be on the right bank of the river. Amid the fog on the previous night Monsieur de Noreff's carriage might easily have crossed one of the bridges. However, a vault of this kind could hardly be within the city limits. It must be situated in the suburbs, and to explain the long descent on the night before, when he had been carried, gagged and blindfolded to the vault, the place must be situated at the foot of some height. After due reflection, and weighing all the probabilities, Jottrat came to the conclusion that he must be near Passy; that the garden that led to his prison was reached by the Rue Basse, and extended along the slope overlooking the stream.

After arriving at this conclusion, he began to ask himself if he were really safe in this vault, which was evidently much lower than the level of the river.

It was now night, and, to the prisoner's great astonishment, the two lamps which on the night before had illuminated this subterranean place had not been lighted again. Profound darkness surrounding him, Jottrat felt a sensation of inexplicable uneasiness take possession of his mind, the more so as the rumbling sound from without seemed to increase. Moreover, from time to time another noise, which it was impossible to mistake, was heard—the dropping of water into water.

At long intervals at first, and then more frequently, the wavelets of the Seine poured in through the two apertures in the window, forming little by little a kind of pond on the floor of the vaulted room. Very soon two abundant streams ran down the wall and flowed into the central pond, which rapidly increased in size. Jottrat soon realised the cause of this inundation. The apertures to admit air had been left by the architect far above the ordinary level of the Seine, and for the water to have reached them the river must have swelled beyond all foresight, and there was no knowing where it would stop. Jottrat remembered perfectly well that a couple of days before he had been kidnapped by Monsieur de Noreff the river had shown a strong tendency to overflow. The winter was nearly over, and as it had been an extremely rainy one, an unusual flood might be expected. It was impossible for Jottrat to conceal from himself that, if the water continued flowing in, he would find himself in a situation of great peril, and perhaps exposed to a terrible death—a death which he

must wait for without power of defending himself from it—a death seem coming step by step. There was but one chance of safety, and that was to get out of this tomb by the trap-door hidden in the vaulted roof, or by the panel at the back of the wardrobe.

He first began by calling aloud for help; but whether his jailers had left the place, or whether his voice was not strong enough to pierce the walls, no one answered his cries. Then, thinking that Monsieur de Noreff might not have properly secured the panel behind the wardrobe, he walked in spite of the darkness towards that article of furniture, and in this short passage found, with alarm, that the water was now nearly a foot deep in the middle of the cave, and several inches deep at the sides, for the floor was inclined in basin-like fashion in the centre, being higher near the walls. He had some trouble in finding the wardrobe on which he founded all his hopes, and when he succeeded in reaching it his delusion quickly took flight, as the panelling was securely sealed, and nothing yielded under the energetic and repeated pressure of his hands. It was evident that the Russian had taken precautions against the flight of his prisoner.

The door could not be opened, and the vaulted ceiling remained inaccessible, while the water was coming in every moment. So Jottrat prepared to die. In all human probability it was nothing more than a question of time. An hour had scarcely elapsed since the first wavelet had fallen into the vault, and the water was already as high as the prisoner's knees. Judging of the height from the floor to the ceiling, he concluded that before daybreak the place would be completely inundated, if the river continued to rise with the same rapidity.

And yet another danger loomed up before him; for he foresaw that the fragile barrier of glass, which had resisted the first shock of the current, would certainly give way under the enormous pressure of the water when the river had reached a certain height, and it was evident that the longer the catastrophe was retarded, the more terrible it would be. Indeed, if the window-panes had strength enough to resist the weight of water pressing against them for any length of time, the liquid mass would, at a given moment, dash with one spurt into the vault, carrying glass and framework away; and the violence of the onslaught would be proportionate to the height of the river. Besides, there was nothing to prove but what the rise might prove higher than the vaulted roof; so that then the room would become full of water from top to bottom, and he, Jottrat, would be doomed as surely as the Duke of Clarence was in his butt of Malmsey wine.

The water running down the wall was increasing in volume, and the vault was visibly filling. For the last quarter of an hour Jottrat had been obliged to stand upon a chair, and even then his feet were in the water, and at last he left it and climbed upon the table. This might mean a respite for half-an-hour, or an hour at the most; but in the result he would have to die, and the bitter thought of losing his life when he had just hoped that he would see his son again, was agony to the unhappy man.

While mounting on the table he had noticed two objects—the first of which was the volume of the History of Normandy that he had left lying open; and the other, the long strap with which he had been gagged on the night before. The chance that had brought the precious volume and the instrument of torture within his reach seemed to him an inspiration from on high, and so, stooping down and placing the book upon his back,

he bound it to him by means of the strap, which he drew three times across his chest, tightening and buckling it properly.

"If I am to be drowned here," he muttered, after finishing these singular preparations, "the secret will die with me; if I am saved, I shall, at least, have saved my weapon." Then, standing firmly erect upon the table, which the water could not carry away as it was solidly fastened to the wall, he awaited his fate, which might be death or deliverance.

The sinister growling of the rushing river was increasing every moment, and the two cascades were still pouring down from the window vent-holes. The darkness was profound, and Jottrat vainly turned his eyes to the window; he could no longer see the wan gleam which but just now had indicated its position. The water must be rising rapidly; inside the vault it had mounted to the prisoner's waist, and a quarter of an hour afterwards had reached his shoulders. He was a perfect swimmer, but what would it avail him to swim in a reservoir without air or opening? He had better die at once.

The unhappy man felt that the moment of death could not be far off, as the water rose with dizzy rapidity. From the top of the wall came a frightful, crashing noise, and at last the water whirled round Jottrat's mouth; then giving a last thought to his son, he closed his eyes before surrendering himself to fate. But suddenly a loud noise, like the report of a cannon, burst above his head, and at the same time feeling a tremendous shock, he disappeared beneath an enormous mass of water which, after breaking through the glass, burst into the vault with the violence of a water spout. It came in with such impetuosity that Jottrat, lifted up like a feather, was thrown violently against the wall at the end. In a moment the torrent had taken possession of all the remaining free space, and now the subterranean lake and the river outside were upon the same level.

If the table upon which Jottrat had stood had been directly under the window, the shock of the enormous mass of water that fell into the vault would have crushed him. However, he only felt the rebound, and had presence of mind enough to hold his breath and extend his arms, thus escaping death for the moment. Still he had great trouble in sustaining himself on the surface of the water, and in avoiding being dashed against the walls of his dungeon which now changed into a reservoir, where the waters revolved, forming a miniature whirlpool which might prove as fatal for Jottrat as the famous Mælstrom which swallows up so many storm-beaten ships on the coast of Norway.

Jottrat, caught in these turning waters, felt himself carried away, without power to resist them, and in spite of the darkness, which was intense, he realised that he was being drawn by degrees toward the central whirlpool. He had already turned three times around the vault, and his hands could no longer touch the walls. In a few moments the eddying water would drag him into its overpowering orbit; in a few moments the liquid monster would devour its prey. The rapid whirling had almost stunned Jottrat who, thinking himself hopelessly lost, only struggled with that animal instinct which impels a man to make the movements necessary for the preservation of his existence. He swam, or rather sustained himself on the water, not trying to direct his course. Besides, as the current was increasing in violence the circle became still narrower. Suddenly, however, his head struck violently against a hard substance, to which his hands clung with the energy of despair.



This unexpected shock had an un hoped-for result, as the prisoner escaped from the movement of rotation, and was thrown against the wall with irresistible violence. With wonderful presence of mind he had retained his hold upon the object which he had encountered, and he tried to ascertain its nature. It was flat and thin, with a rough hard surface, light enough to float and heavy enough to yield a strong support; and Jottrat, although his head was dizzy, realised that it was a plank which the sudden invasion of the water had probably broken away from the bedstead. This stray board, mounting suddenly to the surface, had by the will of Providence come within reach of the prisoner's hands.

It is an adage that good fortune never comes alone, and Jottrat's good luck was completed by the most miraculous of all chances, for this piece of wood had been cast by the water into so good a position that the detective could support himself on one of its ends, while the other extremity protruded out of the window. The result of this was that the great outer current caught the foremost end and drew it out of the fatal rush of the whirlpool; however, the plank did not project far enough outside to be carried away altogether by the river. It had stopped against the wall at a corner of the outlet, one half of it projecting into the Seine, whilst the other half, bearing Jottrat, remained inside the vault. The detective did not like to relax his hold, and yet he understood that the weight of his body was the only obstacle to the action of the outer current. For the board to be carried out of the vault and down the river, he must make a see-saw movement. By a succession of repeated jerks, executed with difficulty in his position, he slowly moved the plank. With his body immersed in the water each movement proved a tremendous effort, and scarcely brought the board more than an inch or so forward. It is true, however, that the work became less and less difficult, for the more the piece of wood projected, the more the weight he had to raise decreased. The time that elapsed during this struggle was short, but Jottrat was not in a state to estimate its duration, and it seemed to him that he had been working for many hours. He felt that sensation one often experiences in dreams when one has to contend against insurmountable obstacles, or when one is carrying on a fruitless pursuit.

Who has not, while asleep, run after an enemy who flew before him, and whom he could never reach? Who has not, in a dream, climbed up a mountain that seemed to increase in height as he ascended? It was an hallucination of this kind that troubled the unhappy prisoner, for although the plank moved forward little by little, he did not perceive that he was advancing slowly but surely to safety.

At length the board protruded sufficiently to be seized and carried out by the current—slowly at first and then like an arrow, with Jottrat still clinging to it. He felt that he had, at least, escaped his first danger, that of being drowned in the dark well where Monsieur de Noreff had abandoned him; and if he must die, it would be in the free air, under heaven's vault, and not between the dark walls of a dungeon.

Now the stream carried him away with incredible rapidity, and before he had time to look round him, he was far away from the vault. It was a black night, there was not a star to be seen, and the waters of the Seine seemed to be ink. The immense mass of water rushed on with a sinister rumbling, the west wind blowing violently, and raising foaming waves which buffeted Jottrat in the face. Blinded also by a pouring rain, and deafened by the heavy continuous roar of the flood, it required all his

efforts to hold on to the plank that supported him. The darkness was so intense that nothing positive could be distinguished beyond the Seine, still Jottrat was struck on seeing rows of lamps dotting the banks of the stream like reddish stars. The quays at that period were seldom lighted beyond the city limits, and so Jottrat concluded from this illumination that contrary to his first conjectures, the vault where he had been confined was within the precincts of Paris. However, he now thought but little of the problem that had so fully occupied him in his prison; for the moment the question was to find a safe landing-place, and that was not easily managed. Jottrat thought he could perceive on his right hand side a steep bank which was not very far off, but the current was so rapid that it would have been difficult to gain a footing there, even if he had had strength enough to cross the river obliquely; and besides, far from taking him near to land, the current drew him into the middle of the stream, so that all he could do was to sustain himself. Although the plank was a great aid in that respect, he felt extreme fatigue, and, above all, suffered from icy coldness, for the long time that he had been in the water in the vault had benumbed his limbs, and he began to fear that his strength would fail him entirely. The book fastened to his back also weighed upon him very heavily; not that it embarrassed his motion, but it seemed to bear him down like a huge burden.

Suddenly he saw just before him a black mass, and at the same time the rapidity of the current increased. The water sped through a narrow arch with the violence of an open mill dam, and before the detective had time to think what bridge he was passing under, a rough shock made him let go of his plank which remained caught against one of the piles. Carried away like a straw by this formidable current, Jottrat shut his eyes and let himself go where the waves listed, and three seconds later, receiving a terrible blow on the head, he fainted away. The current had thrown him on an iron barricade that masked the mouth of a sewer and his body remained between the iron bars projecting into the river. Thus he had just reached the shore at the moment he lost consciousness, and he would inevitably have been drowned had not a man, appearing like a phantom, seized hold of him by his clothing, drawn him forward and disappeared with him inside the vaulted sewer.

## XI.

### THE CAPTAIN'S ADVICE.

A WEEK had elapsed since the terrible night when Jottrat, carried away by the rising Seine, and struggling against death, had been miraculously saved by an unknown person. It was a dark, rainy March evening, and in that same Rue des Marais Saint Germain where Monsieur de Noreff had gone to fetch the detective, a man was walking along wrapped in a large cloak, the broad collar of which was turned up so as to hide half his face. He was not merely a passer-by, for the narrow, miserable street along which he was rapidly walking did not lead directly to any frequented thoroughfare; nor was he an inhabitant of one of the dark houses that overlooked this muddy alley, for he was gazing at their weather-beaten frontages with marked astonishment, evidently surprised to see such a

cut-throat looking place. Some serious motive must have brought him there, for the weather was not of the kind to warrant a nocturnal excursion for amusement's sake. The west wind was blowing violently down the narrow street, and big drops of rain, mingled with flakes of snow, were falling.

Nine o'clock had just struck at the church tower of Saint Germain-des-Prés, and on a night like this the worthy people of this peaceable part of Paris seldom left their firesides. However, the pedestrian did not seem to mind the inclemency of the weather, but went slowly along examining the doors of the houses. The street was not as yet lighted with gas; only two or three lanterns suspended from long cords hung over it, giving but an uncertain light, so that the stranger had to pause some time at each door, trying to make out the number of the house; very often, too, he retraced his steps and began his examination again, fearing that he had made a mistake.

After going and coming several times, he stopped at last before one of the oldest buildings in the street, and as soon as he was convinced that it was the house he was looking for he approached the low door, and was about to raise the heavy knocker, when he seemed to change his mind, and crossing the street, stood where he could see the entire frontage at a glance. He turned his eyes towards the higher stories; but all was dark there, not a light shone in any of the windows. After a few moments' inspection he began grumbling in a low voice, like a man sorely disappointed; no doubt he expected to see a signal, of which there was no sign.

"Ten minutes past nine," he said, taking out a very handsome watch; "so I have not come too early, and as I wrote to him yesterday, he must expect me this evening." This monologue was followed by a gesture of impatience. However, the promenader seemed to resign himself to his disappointment, for he resumed his walk, saying: "After all, he may have been kept at the Prefecture of Police; still, if in twenty minutes time the lamp isn't at the window, I shall go in and inquire for him."

From where he stood the Rue de Seine was about a hundred paces distant, so he began walking towards it to occupy his time, not in the most agreeable manner though, as the pavement was very slippery. He at first thought that he was the only person in the street. But it was not so, for within an interval of a few seconds he passed two men who followed one another, and whom he thought he had already met at the other end of the street. No doubt he had some motive for dreading any suspicious-looking persons, for he turned his head several times to scan these passers-by, and he saw, by the wavering light of the nearest lantern, that they wore blouses and caps, and were probably workmen returning home.

There was nothing unusual in such a meeting; and besides, if the Rue des Marais was dark, the Rue de Seine, at the corner of which he stopped, was full of light and life; joyous bands of students were passing along shouting and singing, while the cafés and shops, brilliant with lights, were full of people. This animated picture was enough to reassure the most timid individual; and the promenader, shrugging his shoulders as if reproaching himself for his momentary anxiety, returned unhesitatingly into the Rue des Marais. After again looking at his watch, he started with a determined air towards the house before which he had already stationed himself, glancing at the upper front windows, in which there was still no light,

"I must know what I have to depend upon," he murmured, while crossing the street; "I have gone out against the advice of my physician, and at all events I don't wish to lose my time." While saying this he walked to the door above which there was a white plate with the number 19 painted in black figures. He gave a loud knock, which resounded through the old house, and after a rather long interval the portal opened. The visitor went in, and found himself in a large vestibule, full of boards and carpenters' tools; and amidst the mass of wood, the place being imperfectly lighted, he had some trouble in finding his way; but after a moment he saw a lamp shining at the top of a few worn stone steps—a lamp which appeared to him like a light-house. It lit up the door-keeper's room. There was a small window to this room, a window opened from either side, and the visitor turning the handle and popping in his head inquired "Monsieur Jottrat, if you please?"

He had spoken without seeing whom he was addressing, for a thick cloud of odoriferous smoke filled the lodge; in fact, the combination of culinary perfumes and tobacco which issued from this den was vile enough to make a grenadier of the Old Guard start back. So the visitor's first movement was to beat a retreat, but a shrill voice stopped him at the moment when he was about to close the window of the pestilential place.

"Monsieur Jottrat is not in," cried an old woman; "what do you want with him?"

The visitor, surprised and shocked at this reception, was thinking of a proper reproof to set this familiarly-minded woman in her right place, when a masculine face emerged from the dense cloud of smoke, and at the same time a deep and steady voice remarked: "Monsieur Jottrat is out, sir; but it won't be long before he comes in, and if you will take the trouble to wait here——"

However gracious the invitation might be, the visitor, disgusted no doubt at the atmosphere he would have to breathe inside, seemed disposed to remain on the landing; whereupon the previous speaker resumed in a still more courteous tone: "Pray come in, sir. I am one of Monsieur Jottrat's best friends, and if it is anything I can tell him I will do so willingly."

After some hesitation the visitor decided, to cross the threshold. He thought he saw some shadows moving about on the upper part of the staircase, and he probably did not wish to speak before a numerous audience. After becoming a little accustomed to the nauseous fog which filled the room, he perceived a dirty woman seated beside a stove, and cooking some infernal dish; while a little further off, in a corner, stood the person who had spoken to him, and who had the appearance of a respectable citizen.

While the visitor was occupied in examining this man's face—which had nothing remarkable about it, excepting that it was adorned with long white whiskers—another question reached him through the smoke: "What do you want with Monsieur Jottrat?"

"And what is that to you?" was the visitor's answer.

"It is this much—that if you don't tell me, I shall be obliged to take you where you will be forced to explain yourself!"

"Ah! that is really carrying matters too far."

At this moment two men abruptly entered the room and stationed themselves in such a manner as to prevent all egress, while the placid-looking citizen resumed: "It is useless to try to escape, and if you wish

to avoid a disagreeable business pray tell me immediately your name, position, and the motive of your visit."

The visitor, thinking no doubt that it was time to put an end to this unpleasant conversation, walked straight up to his questioner, and, taking him by the button of his overcoat, looked him steadily in the face and said: "I am the Viscount Edmond de Sartilly. I have come here on purely private business, and now you must prove to me on the spot that you have the right to question me, or I swear that I will give you such a lesson as you well deserve."

The name, the title, and the visitor's tone of voice seemed to make an impression on his questioner, who at once retorted: "I am sorry to be obliged to treat you in the same way as other people, sir, but my instructions are precise. I am employed on the detective police, and am on service here, with a mission to arrest all the persons who come to inquire after Monsieur Jottrat."

"So that I have fallen into a trap?" interrupted the viscount.

"It is what we call a mouse-trap," answered the police officer, graciously, and now seemingly disposed to furnish all possible explanations.

"And what is the motive of this measure?"

"I will tell you, sir. A very singular event took place here last week. Our comrade Jottrat, whom we greatly esteem, went away from here one evening with a gentleman whom the door-keeper did not know, and although a week has since elapsed he has not returned."

"What! he also has disappeared!" cried the viscount, fairly stupefied.

"Disappeared; that's the very word, for it has as yet been impossible to obtain the least information about him, although a very active search has been made, and our chief, presuming that Jottrat's disappearance is due to some crime, has decided to organise a watch at his house."

"Your chief is very probably right, and I shall perhaps be able to give him some useful information. Where and when can I see him?"

"The meeting will be all the easier," answered the agent, smiling, "as I have a formal order to take all the people who come here to the prefecture, and you are the first who has come to inquire after Jottrat."

"Well," said the viscount, quite at his ease, "take me there."

"You will excuse me, sir; I cannot leave my place, but there are two men here who will go with you."

Sartilly, on turning round and seeing his escort ready, left the room without saluting his questioner, and even without looking at the woman, who certainly took him for a great criminal. The viscount went down the steps, and was the first to cross the threshold of the house, the two sub-alterns respectfully walking a few paces in the rear. However, Edmond had scarcely set his feet in the street, and his escort was still in the dark vestibule, when he was suddenly seized by the throat, and two strong hands endeavoured to choke him by pulling his cravat. The pressure was so strong and so skilfully applied that the viscount, losing his breath, lacked the time to cry out, and almost immediately another assailant took him by his legs, and drew him into the middle of the street, trying to throw him down.

All this was accomplished so rapidly, that Sartilly was already on the ground when his escort crossed the threshold. On seeing the person whom they were to take to the prefecture attacked by a couple of strangers, the two police agents at once threw themselves into the conflict, and their

intervention proved decisive. The bandits who were holding Sartilly found themselves attacked from behind at the very moment when they were about finishing their work. At first they showed an inclination to resist, but, after exchanging a few blows, they suddenly altered their minds and ran off, the officers pursuing them, without troubling themselves about their prisoner, whom they thought unable to move.

The viscount, half suffocated, tried to get up, vaguely hearing the cries, "Stop ! stop !" which were every moment growing more distant. When he had recovered his breath and was able to stand, all was quiet in the little street ; and now, being alone and free to act as he pleased, he considered that his visit to the prefecture might be postponed without inconvenience. After the assault he had just experienced, the wisest thing he could do was to go home, for he felt extremely weak, and it seemed to him that his wound, scarcely closed, would open afresh.

"I have not been fortunate in my first outing," he murmured, directing his steps as quickly as possible towards the Rue de Seinc. But as he walked along his strength failed him, and he was obliged to support himself by leaning against the walls, and he even had some idea of returning to Jottrat's house to ask for the assistance of the agent whose subordinates had been so useful to him ; however, he shrank from the prospect of a fresh sojourn in the doorkeeper's pestilential abode. Then it occurred to him that his friend, Châteaubrun, lived rather near, and that at the captain's home he might be able to rest, and pick up his strength before returning to the Rue d'Astorg.

Sartilly had taken care not to use his own carriage on visiting Jottrat, and he now remembered opportunely that he had left a cab waiting at the corner of the Rue de Seine and the Rue Mazarine. He managed to drag himself so far ; he awakened the sleeping driver, and made him take him to the house where the captain resided in the Quai d'Orsay.

By a happy chance, Châteaubrun had remained at home that evening, with a cup of tea and a box of cigars before him. Prior to the duel, in which he had acted as Sartilly's second, they had only been club acquaintances, but since then he had shown the viscount the devotion and affection of a true friend ; in fact, he scarcely ever left the wounded man, who felt extremely grateful to him, even confiding to him a portion of his worries ; so when the viscount, after alighting from his cab and climbing the stairs, drew back the door-hangings of the smoking-room, where Châteaubrun was philosophising in the chimney-corner, the captain looked up with mingled pleasure and surprise.

"You, Edmond, you ?" cried the captain, "coming to see me on the occasion of your first outing ? Ah ! that's right ; but no, it is very wrong, on the contrary," he said with an oath ; "it is folly, real folly ! The doctor forbade you to leave your room, and at this time of night you ought to be in bed."

"You are a hundred times right, my dear fellow," replied Sartilly, "and when I tell you that I have just been arrested, and half strangled, in honour of my convalescence, you will be still more alarmed."

"What ! what !"

"Let me sit down first, for my legs are giving way."

"But, for heaven's sake, tell me where you have come from, and what has happened to you ?"

On the terms that he now was with Châteaubrun, Sartilly had very little to hide from him, so he made no difficulty about relating what had

happened to him in the Rue des Marais. The captain was already acquainted with Sartilly's suspicions as regards Monsieur de Noreff, and his anxiety as to Roger de Mensignac's fate; and since the duel, the loss of the volume of the History of Normandy had led to a revelation of almost all the recent events; however, Jottrat's name had never been mentioned by the two friends.

"My dear friend," said Châteaubrun, when the viscount had finished explaining the object of his visit to the detective, "you have acted very wrongly this evening. First, you have done wrong to go out alone, when you are scarcely convalescent, knowing also that you have an enemy of Noreff's stamp. You have nearly lost your life twice, and the third time it will all be up with you; besides, you have acted very wrongly in connecting yourself with a police agent."

"But what am I to do? You see that we accomplish nothing. Can I let Roger's name be dishonoured?"

Sartilly also had Jeanne's name on his lips, which the captain understood, and he did not answer at once, fearing to offend his friend. Finally, however, he said: "All the same, I have no faith in persons who are spies by profession."

"Well, I very much fear," continued the viscount, "that poor Jottrat has fallen a victim to some great snare. Perhaps it was known that he had offered me his services, and those scamps wanted to get rid of him."

"What makes you think so? May not this man have been taking fees on both sides? Who knows if those two strapping fellows who seized you by the collar were not emissaries of his?"

"It might be so; but I want to act, and I see no means of doing so alone."

"My dear Edmond," said the captain, in a solemn manner, "I have a proposal to make to you."

"You know very well that I accept it in advance."

"You are looking for some one to help you, eh? Well, why not take a soldier?"

"But what soldier?"

"I. I who for ten days past have been serving my apprenticeship; do you know that I am a very good spy already?"

"You, my dear Châteaubrun?"

"Yes, I myself, my dear sir. It seems that I have a peculiar aptness for this profession; and if I were to tell you all that I have already discovered, you would be astonished."

"I ask nothing better than to hear it."

"First of all, then, I have ascertained from a very good source that Monsieur de Dohna and his two companions, who went off without letting me pull their ears, are scamps of the worst kind, and that Dohna has never had any diplomatic mission whatever."

"I had already doubted it."

"Besides that, I know the scoundrels who tried to murder you in the Avenue de Neuilly on the night before the duel."

"What! Are you sure that you are not mistaken?"

"No! no! I am not mistaken, I warrant you. I have proof that two of these cut-throats were servants of Monsieur de Noreff's; as to the third, my information is not so precise, but I shall find out all about him before long; and now that I have given you a specimen of my skill, will you

take me for your aide-de-camp? If my proposal pleases you, I will obtain a month's furlough and begin the campaign with you immediately."

The viscount certainly had not expected this proposal; but it was made in so frank a manner, and the captain had been so loyal a friend, that he held out his hand to him and exclaimed, "I accept."

"Very well!" cried Châteaubrun, throwing the fag end of his cigar into the fire; "to-morrow I will begin operations, and I shall perhaps be able to give you some news of the famous volume of the 'History of the Province of Normandy.'"

"You have perhaps found a similar work at one of the public libraries?"

"No! no! I keep clear of the libraries; I acknowledge that they are not my forte," said the captain, modestly. "It seems that this book has become very rare; however, I think I have discovered our thief of the Bois."

"Is it possible?"

"Possible! It is nearly certain; and, besides, you already know something about it."

"No, I assure you I don't."

"What! didn't Mademoiselle de Mensignac tell you what I said to her when I had the honour of seeing her at her house at five o'clock to-day?"

"When and where could she have told me? You know my dear friend, that Miss Georgina has been ill for a week, and that Mademoiselle de Mensignac can't come to my house unaccompanied."

"Well, Miss Georgina was in perfect health to-day, for she was in the drawing-room with Mademoiselle Jeanne, and I presume that she accompanied her to your house this evening."

"To my house this evening?"

"Certainly, for the meeting with the notary."

"Excuse me, my dear Châteaubrun; but pray explain yourself more clearly."

"It seems to me that I have been very clear in my statements, but I will try to be still more precise. Well, this afternoon, while I was talking to the ladies, a letter was brought from you."

"A letter from me to Mademoiselle de Mensignac?"

"Yes, a letter, in which you announced that, as you were almost well again, Monsieur Calmet, the notary, would go to your place this evening at half-past ten o'clock to sign the contract for the sale of Mademoiselle de Mensignac's house, and that, as your physician had forbidden you to go out, you would send your brougham to fetch the ladies."

"And did Jeanne say she would go?" asked the viscount, turning as pale as death.

"Of course she did; and by the way it was an odd idea of yours to go out after appointing an hour to meet them; why are you not at your own house at this moment?"

"Why?" cried Sartilly, besides himself with grief and rage; "because that letter was not from me! because it was an infamous forgery! because those wretches have kidnapped Jeanne!"

"Is this really true?" asked the captain, rising up and looking very anxious and angry; "in that case, I am going with you. It is ten o'clock and we can reach the Mensignac mansion in a quarter of an hour if you have your carriage below."

"I have only a cab," said Sartilly, despairingly.



"Well, it must do. I know how to make cabs move; come," exclaimed Châteaubrun, darting to the staircase, after he had provided himself with a stout stick and placed a brace of pistols in his pocket.

"Shall we arrive in time?" muttered Sartilly, following his friend.

"Coachman, to the Trocadéro; twenty francs gratuity, if you arrive there in twenty minutes; nothing, if you are more than half an hour!" cried Châteaubrun, jumping into the cab which was waiting at the door. The captain had descended the staircase in three bounds, and Sartilly had followed him closely.

"A gold coin!" said the driver, who, for a wonder was not asleep; "it will kill Cocotte, perhaps; however, we will be there in a quarter of an hour."

Then giving his horse one of those long cuts with the whip that rouse the worst nags in creation, he succeeded in making it start at a fast gallop. The cab was one of those small brougham-like vehicles which had only just come into fashion, and the two friends, leaning out of the door on either side, mutually urged the driver to make haste.

"Let him alone, Sartilly," at last said the captain; "that fellow has served in the cavalry. I saw it in a moment by the way he took up the reins. He will manage matters all right."

"Ah! if we can only arrive in time," rejoined the viscount, without taking his eyes off the horse.

Châteaubrun, although much less disturbed than his friend, gave also a glance at the animal. "It is all right, my dear fellow," he remarked, rubbing his hands; "by great good luck, we have fallen in with a horse which although old still has a little blood in its veins; and I warrant you that we shall arrive in good time."

The captain was right, for the cab rolled along rapidly enough to make one feel giddy; and the horse, seeming to understand what was expected of him, did not relax in his speed or even need any urging from his driver. They soon reached the bridge of La Concorde, which they crossed in a few seconds, the driver turning along the right hand quay, which was then very badly paved, so that they began to jolt in an alarming manner. At that hour, and in that season, the Cours-la-Reine was but little frequented, so that the vehicle was able to proceed at the same rapid pace without there being much fear of a collision. Sartilly kept his watch in his hand, looking alternately at the dial and at the road along which they were flying, while the captain, who was calmer, now and then addressed a word of encouragement to the driver. This did not, however, prevent him from reflecting upon the situation and questioning his friend, so that he might be more completely informed. "Did your servants know that you were going out this evening?" he asked Sartilly.

"Yes; I told Antoine, my valet, this morning."

"Are you sure of your people?"

"Of Antoine, yes; but much less of Toby."

"Who is Toby?"

"My groom."

"Your groom? the young fellow who has such a cunning look—too cunning, indeed! He is very young, however, to meddle in affairs like this one."

Sartilly did not answer; his thoughts were elsewhere.

"You see, my dear friend," resumed the captain, "it seems to me that the two affairs form part of the same scheme. It was arranged that Mademoiselle de Mensignac should be carried off this evening because it

was supposed that you would not go to her house ; and so that matters might not happen amiss at the Trocadéro, it was decided that you should be attacked and possibly murdered in the Rue des Marais."

Sartilly's only answer was a cry of rage.

"It follows, of course," continued Châteaubrun, "that the enemy who organised these two affairs must have been informed of your movements this evening."

"Who brought the forged letter to Jeanne?" asked the viscount, suddenly struck with the plausibility of his friend's reasoning.

"Unfortunately, I do not know," sighed the captain; "a footman handed it to Mademoiselle de Mensignac, and I did not, of course, ask who had brought it to the door."

"However, we can find that out from the porter at her house. Besides, as long as I find Jeanne I don't care about the rest."

The vehicle was now rolling along the Quai de Billy, and the horse still flew on like the wind.

"Listen to me, my dear fellow," continued Châteaubrun. "Will you let me direct our expedition? You are not as composed as I am, and you are leaving too much to chance, while I have my plan ready." The viscount made a gesture of discouragement and indifference. "I will take the command, then," resumed the officer, "and I have but one more question to ask you. I want you to describe your new brougham to me—the one that Clochet has just built for you."

"My brougham?"

"Yes, is it high or low? What is its size? and the colour of its body and wheels?"

"It is a large brougham with room for three. It is hung very high, and its colour is a light reddish brown. But what has all that to do with this affair?"

"I have my reasons for asking you, for I am sure I heard Mademoiselle de Mensignac say to her English companion that you would send your brougham for them this evening."

"That would be too audacious," murmured the viscount.

"However, my dear fellow, if those who have betrayed you have had the audacity to take your carriage, it is necessary that I should be able to recognize it. Who knows but what we might meet it on the road?"

The cab at this moment reached the bridge of Jena, and the driver turned round to call out, "Gentlemen, here we are at the Trocadéro. How many minutes have we been?"

"Go on; it is higher up; turn round the Rue des Batailles. Ten francs more if you go up at a trot."

"Never fear, gentlemen; Cocotte can go three miles further at this rate." And having made this rather rash remark, the triumphant cabman, gaily cracking his whip, turned to the right.

At this period a shady esplanade covered the spot where the Trocadéro grounds now stand, and a paved road, very steep and badly kept, led to the summit of the plateau on which the palace is perched. Half-way up the incline, near a rocky hillock, the road forked, proceeding on the left towards Passy, and on the right towards the high street of Chaillot, by which the Mensignac mansion was reached. The vehicle crossed the esplanade, Sartilly's impatience redoubling as he drew nearer. He no longer heard Châteaubrun, who was explaining his plan; in fact, leaning out of the vehicle, he was looking in front of him, as if he could

already see the Mensignac mansion, although the hill completely concealed it from view.

"Sartilly, my dear friend," said the captain, "pray compose yourself; if you don't remain calm we shall make a bad business of it. Remember that in five minutes' time we shall be there, and then there won't be any time to lose in asking questions."

"You are right; tell me your plans. What do you intend doing?"

"I explained it to you a few moments ago. If we arrive at the house before the rascals do, you must go in and warn Mademoiselle Jeanne, and I will stay at the door to receive them. If we overtake the carriage on its way to the house I will undertake to stop it. While you are occupied with the ladies, I will find out what we have to expect from your enemies; for if we take them in the act, by capturing one of them we shall soon detect all the others."

"But if Jeanne has already started? if we don't meet the carriage?"

"But a carriage cannot disappear like an individual. We will give the description of your brougham to the police, and they will know how to find it again."

"Ah! the police!" said the viscount, bitterly; "it is not on them that I depend; but we are not moving," he added impatiently, leaning out of the cab to urge the driver to increase his speed.

"You will break down the horse," said Châteaubrun, in a low voice, "and we shall be left on the road. Ah! only the men who have served in the army are good for anything," he added, by way of conclusion.

It was time, indeed, to moderate the horse's pace if they did not want to lose all chance of arriving, for the poor animal was blowing and puffing, whilst its legs trembled, and it was evident that if they did not give it time to draw breath it would founder; so the captain, leaning out of the other door, made a sign to the driver, who thereupon mounted the hill more slowly.

"We are to turn to the right, are we not, gentlemen?" he asked.

"Of course; we are not going to Passy."

"Well, I must keep my eyes open then, for here comes a carriage at full speed."

And, indeed, for a moment the subdued but rapid rumble which betokens the approach of a private carriage had been heard, and betwixt the branches of the trees, two lamps could now be seen coming along like meteors, while the regular rapid trot of a pair of horses became audible. A vague instinct forewarned both Sartilly and the captain, and they rose up to take a better view. Their vehicle had just reached the spot where the road forked, when the approaching carriage coming onward like a cannon ball emerged from the turning to the right. The cabman tried to hold in his horse, but it was too late, and one of the horses of the approaching carriage came into collision with one of the cab shafts.

There was a moment of indescribable confusion, the two friends jumped to the ground to see if the accident were serious, and almost at once a cry escaped Sartilly, for he had recognised his own brougham, and had caught a glimpse through the windows of two frightened women inside. He immediately ran to the door of the brougham, while the captain, springing at the horses' heads, tried to seize hold of the reins, and the cab driver endeavoured to disentangle Cocotte, whose head was caught in the harness of the brougham. As for the latter vehicle, it was difficult to say what was passing inside it for the windows remained closed and neither of the two

women whom Sartilly had caught a glimpse of appeared. They did not seem to attach much importance to the collision, and either their conversation was very interesting, or their preoccupation very great, for they did not even deign to inquire what the accident was.

The driver of the brougham and a man seated beside him on the box seemed much less at their ease. The fellow who held the reins was on the right—that is to say, on the other side of the box—and Châteaubrun, who held the left horse, could not see him; however, the lashes which began to rain down on the captain's head plainly indicated the driver's intentions. It was evident that he wanted to release himself and his vehicle at any price, and judging by his manner he had important reasons for wishing to make off. Châteaubrun lowered his head, and tried to screen his face with his arm; but he soon understood that he could not hold his position, and changing his tactics at the very moment when Sartilly tapped on one of the closed windows, he let go of the reins he had seized upon, and leaping on one side, raised the stick with which he had provided himself, giving it a skilful twirl and dealing a vigorous blow at the man seated on the box beside the driver. This blow produced an effect which Châteaubrun had certainly not expected, for the fellow, no doubt seriously hurt, was thrown against his companion, the driver, who, surprised by the shock, drew up the reins involuntarily. At the same instant the horses, already very much excited, reared and plunged and suddenly bolted up the turning to the left in the direction of Passy, their flight being so sudden, that the captain did not even try to stop them, while Sartilly merely had time to jump back so as to avoid being run over.

The two friends were amazed, and stood looking at the carriage, which had already reached the first houses in the high street. They did not think of pursuing it, as that would have both useless and senseless. The horse that had brought them so far was evidently not in a state to begin a new race, being scarcely able to stand.

Sartilly wept with rage, while Châteaubrun shook his fist at the flying brougham, neither of them having the courage to speak. The cab-driver, who had not left his seat, and who had understood nothing whatever of the affair, was the first to open his mouth. "Really, sir," he said, addressing the captain, "you do not strike lightly. I saw that blow of yours coming down on the man's head. After all, it was quite right to give them a lesson, for, even if they were driving a private carriage, they had no business to collide with us. A little more, and Cocotte's four feet would have been in the air." The garrulous old fellow would have gone on talking ever so long without fear of interruption, for the two friends were not listening to him.

"Was it really she?" asked Châteaubrun of the viscount, whose only answer was a despairing and affirmative gesture. "Then," resumed the captain, "it is useless to go to the house; we must change our batteries."

"Ah!" cried Sartilly, whose grief burst out at last; "Jeanne is lost, and those miserable scoundrels have escaped us again."

"Perhaps."

"Can't you realise that this worthless jade of ours couldn't trot another hundred steps?"

"Well, I don't mean to run after them, and you know that you have promised to let me command. If you will trust to me, I think my idea a good one."

The viscount shook his head in sign of doubt, but Châteaubrun, paying

no attention to this want of confidence, approached the cabman, giving him the promised twenty-franc piece. "Can your horse take us to the Rue de Varennes at a slow trot? or at a walk, if you like it?" he asked.

"Oh! Cocotte can certainly take you, although your friend called her a worthless jade," answered the driver, in a tone of wounded dignity.

"Then let us be off," exclaimed the captain, pushing Sartilly into the cab, and jumping in after him. "Cross the bridge of Jena; follow the avenue which skirts the Champ de Mars on the left, and pass behind the Invalides."

"That won't take long," answered the driver, turning his horse towards the Seine, and adding to himself: "If these fellows haven't lost their heads, may oats cost fifty francs a bushel this year."

Sartilly certainly had the same opinion as the driver respecting his friend, for the idea of retracing their steps seemed absurd to him, but he did not oppose this course, realising that pursuit would be utterly futile. The poor horse, which had had time to breathe during this short rest, went slowly down the hill, and the captain thought it a good time to explain his plan to the viscount. "You think me crazy, my dear Sartilly," he quietly said; "but I am going to prove to you that I am in my senses." The viscount, crushed by his grief, listened absently. "Who do you suspect," resumed Châteaubrun, "of this abominable attempt to kidnap Mademoiselle de Mensignac?"

"Why, who could I suspect but that miserable scamp, Noreff?"

"I am decidedly of your opinion, and so I conclude that the carriage which is carrying Mademoiselle de Mensignac away will proceed to his house."

"You certainly saw that it was not going in that direction."

"I saw that it went off towards Passy, but that was simply because the horses had run away. They will become quieter by the time they reach the top of the hill. The driver will then come back by way of the Rue Basse or some side street, and proceed to Noreff's house. So our only chance of meeting the vehicle again is to go and wait at his door."

This plain reasoning struck Sartilly, for it was probable if not certain that Jeanne would be taken to Noreff's mansion, and alarmed by the Trocadéro affair, the driver would no longer take a direct route.

The faintest gleam of hope is sometimes sufficient to brighten the most desperate situation. Sartilly began to recover his courage, and he rapidly reflected as to the various contingencies that might arise. The cab was already at the entrance of the Champ de Mars, and they would now quickly reach the Boulevard des Invalides. "If we meet the carriage again," said the viscount, "we must not let it escape us as it did just now. I'll shout and scream for help."

"Don't be uneasy. I have two companions in my pocket which will make as much noise as we shall require, and if the driver and horses try to get off again, I shall fire one at the men and the other at the animals. I am sorry that I forgot just now that I had some pistols about me."

"Yes, yes, the scoundrels ought to die."

"By the way, did Mademoiselle de Mensignac recognise you?"

"I am sure she did not. A woman whose features I could not distinguish was on the side where I stood. I divined that Jeanne was there rather than saw her."

"Listen!" interrupted the captain, catching hold of Sartilly's arm.

The cab was at that moment half way along the road leading from the

quay to the military school. At that period the Champ de Mars was skirted by deep, wide trenches, and the entrance on this side was by two iron gates always open. There was a bridge over the trench at a short distance ahead of the cab, and from where they were stationed the rapid rolling of a carriage could be distinctly heard coming towards the Champ de Mars, and drawing near the gate.

"I'll wager that those are our brigands, taking a cross cut to shorten the distance," said Châteaubrun. "I was right when I said that they would merely go round Passy. They didn't expect that we should be before them, and cross their path."

While the captain was still speaking, two lamps were seen at the turning near the bridge, and passed along the avenue towards the Invalides; a second opportunity would thus be lost if they could not overtake the carriage. "Thunder!" exclaimed Châteaubrun; "two minutes sooner, and we would have met them exactly."

"A hundred francs if you do not lose sight of them!" cried Sartilly to the driver, who succeeded in making his poor beast start into a final gallop. If they could not overtake the abductors, it was at least essential that they should remain near enough to see where they went. The cab rolled along for a few moments without losing much ground, when the horse suddenly swerved, so that the vehicle was almost overturned by a milestone. The captain put his head out of the window to see what the matter was, and the driver cried out to him, while backing his horse: "It is one of the two men who were on the box of the carriage; he has just fallen off, and we nearly drove over him."

"It appears my blow went home," said Châteaubrun; "we will return this way by-and-bye, and find out who the fellow is."

The accident had, no doubt, caused some confusion and trouble in the carriage which was ahead, as it now rolled along more slowly. They were already within speaking distance, and Sartilly called out Jeanne's name several times, while the captain got his pistols ready.

"Gentlemen," again cried the driver, who was in a better situation than the two friends to see what was transpiring around him, "there is a woman here, lying on the ground."

"A woman!" exclaimed the viscount, leaning out to take a look.

The carriage had already gone on again at the same fast pace, and the light of its lamps grew fainter and fainter in the distance; however, the woman's body lying across the avenue in white garments stood out against the dark ground.

"They have killed her," cried Sartilly, before he was even able to recognise the body lying in the middle of the avenue.

"The fact is," said the captain, "that while the carriage was driving on, they perhaps finished their work."

It seemed very difficult to understand what had happened, for the pursued carriage had not once stopped; and yet two of its occupants—an outside and an inside passenger, a man and woman—were lying on the ground. When the cab reached the spot where the woman's body was extended, the lamps of the carriage had just passed round the corner of the military school. The cabman now drew up, for he began to understand that some kidnapping business had been in question, and he was loath to proceed, seeing a woman lying motionless in the avenue. "I think the race is over," he said to himself, as he stopped his horse at the side of the road. "Cocotte won't be sorry for it."

The viscount and the captain had jumped to the ground without loss of time. "It is she!" cried Sartilly, for the instinct of his heart had not deceived him; it was really Jeanne de Mensignac that was lying there motionless, inanimate, perhaps dead.

The young girl was stretched on her right side, with outstretched arms, her body wrapped in one of those white burnouses which the conquest of Algeria had recently brought into fashion. She looked as if she were asleep. The captain, who never lost his presence of mind, took one of the cab-lamps, and when the light fell on Jeanne's face, he could not restrain an exclamation of painful surprise. Sartilly, on his side, almost fell to the ground, for the young girl's charming features were covered with blood, which was flowing from a wound in her forehead.

"I knew very well that they had killed her!" said the viscount.

"Perhaps not," replied the captain; "it's a good sign when a wound bleeds freely." While speaking, he had placed the lamp on the ground, and taken hold of the young girl's arm, his friend looking on without having recovered from his stupor. "Dead!" cried Châteaubrun, after feeling Jeanne's pulse; "no, no my dear friend, and not, I hope, for a long time to come."

"Is it indeed true that she is alive?" muttered Sartilly, clasping his hands.

"You shall see in a moment," continued the worthy captain, wiping Jeanne's face with a handkerchief. "Look! she is already moving;" and indeed the wounded girl moved her hand feebly, as if trying to repulse some one. "But we must have some water to bring her round more quickly," added Châteaubrun, with the composure of a military surgeon on the battle-field.

"I'll go for some, gentlemen," said the cab-driver who had alighted to see what was going on. "I can leave Cocotte alone; she doesn't want to run away."

The captain, accustomed to this part of Paris, for he often came to visit comrades living in the neighbourhood of the military school, remembered that at the end of the avenue there was a fountain and a cab-stand. "Yonder to the left," he cried to the driver, "you will find the place; bring the water quickly, but don't let any one come with you; and if you want a good gratuity, not a word to your comrades."

Châteaubrun knew it would be unadvisable, if not dangerous, to have the evening's events noised abroad. Meanwhile Sartilly, still incapable of thinking, had raised the young girl's head, and was gazing at her pale face, and watching her gradual return to life.

"It is singular," said the captain. "I don't understand what weapon could have inflicted that wound on her forehead; the skin is raised as if it were a sabre cut, but if murder had been the object, her heart would have been aimed at."

"Jeanne struggled with her murderer," interrupted Sartilly, "for both her dress and burnous are torn."

"I have it!" Châteaubrun suddenly exclaimed; "there is no murder in the case, her fall alone caused this wound; look," he added, pointing out a rather large sharp stone stained with blood.

Sartilly shook his head in sign of doubt.

"I can tell you exactly how it all happened, as well as if I had seen it," replied the imperturbable captain. "Mademoiselle de Mensignac was induced to believe that she was being taken to your house, and while going

there her suspicions must have been aroused, either after our meeting at the Trocadéro, or else because she saw the carriage turning away from the Rue d'Astorg. Then she called to the driver to stop, and not being listened to, she opened the carriage door, and in jumping out she fell, and her head struck against this stone."

"And these traces of a struggle?" murmured Sartilly, pointing to the girl's torn garments.

"They prove that I am right. The woman who was with her in the carriage tried to hold her back, and whether she was an accomplice in the kidnapping, or whether she only wanted to prevent Mademoiselle de Mensignac from breaking her neck, at all events she hung on to her bur-nous and dress."

"Ah! if you were right, the people who were carrying her off would have stopped to pick her up."

"Yes, if they had not heard our cab coming after them, but they feared being caught. But you know that they have already lost a man on the way, and I intend to go and examine him by-and-bye."

The scene that was passing in this deserted avenue was a curious one; and if a stranger, brought there by chance, had seen it, he would have thought himself far away from Paris. A cab at the side of the road; two young men leaning over the prostrate form of a young girl; the lamp throwing its dim light on the group—all suggested a scene of highway robbery in some remote corner of Calabria, rather than an accident in the quiet district of the Invalides. The road was silent and deserted, not even the song of a tardy soldier returning to his barracks could be heard. However, the captain turned his head on hearing approaching footsteps, and he felt worried, not caring to be surprised by strangers in the present situation; but it was the worthy cab-driver who was coming on as fast as he could, bringing a large pail full of water. "There is no danger of the brougham returning," said he. "I saw it going off along the esplanade; they are far enough away by now, I warrant you, and they upset a truck in their haste."

"Give me your bucket, quick," said Châteaubrun, without answering this report, which was, however, very agreeable to him. Then, with infinite precautions, the worthy captain began to wash the young girl's face. He had judged rightly, for the wound on the forehead, when cleansed of the blood, looked quite superficial, and had merely been caused by a fall on a sharp stone.

Sartilly's face shone with delight on seeing this, and happiness restored his composure. While he continued to support the wounded girl's head, Châteaubrun treated the case with the care and skill of an old practitioner. After washing away the blood and bandaging the forehead skilfully, he began to throw drops of water on the young girl's face; and Jeanne, shuddering at this sudden application of icy water, extended her arms, muttering some disconnected words, and finally opening her eyes. She gazed with a fixed stare at the strange scene presented to her view, without understanding it and she was evidently trying to collect her thoughts, bewildered by a violent shock.

The captain on his knees before her, the coachman holding the bucket, must have appeared to her like some of those strange forms which people the unknown world of dreams. She could not see Sartilly, as he stood behind her supporting her head; but he made a sign to Châteaubrun, who, understanding it, took his place. Then the viscount coming forward, knelt



down by Jeanne's side, leaning over her; their eyes met, her face became suddenly animated, and moving her hands feebly she cried, in an agitated voice, "Edmond! Edmond!" Then her eyelids were lowered again, her mouth closed, her face, already so pale, became still paler, while the blood flowed afresh from her wound; the shock had been too great and unexpected, and the young girl once more fainted away.

"You were too eager—too soon, my dear friend," said the captain; "this isn't the time or place to indulge in emotion. Take my advice, and don't let her see you for a little while; the best thing we can do is to take Mademoiselle de Mensignac home."

The viscount nodded approvingly.

"Come, help us," said Châteaubrun to the driver; "we are going to place this young lady in your cab, and take her to the Trocadéro; but at a walk this time, and, above all, no jolts."

The three men gently carried the wounded girl to the vehicle, and the captain, after placing her with extreme care on the back seat, said to Sartilly: "You, my dear friend, had better sit on the small seat in front, and see that she doesn't fall. I will proceed on foot to watch the horse, which may perhaps break down on the road." The viscount was already preparing to get into the cab when the captain added in a low voice: "Before starting, come with me to the spot where that scoundrel fell from the box, for I have an idea that either you or I may recognise him. Pay attention to the lady," he said to the driver, and then followed by Sartilly carrying the lamp, he walked towards the man's body which was lying on the ground, some forty paces away. The fellow was extended on his back, with his arms stretched out, his face pale and his lips stiff. "He is dead," said Châteaubrun, stooping down; "but how did it happen?" The lamp threw its light full on the dead man's face. "Ah, ah!" continued the captain, "it was my blow at the Trocadéro that split his skull. I did not think I had struck so hard."

"It is he!" cried Sartilly, suddenly.

"He! Who?"

"The fellow of the Bois de Boulogne,"

The deceased was a man between fifty and sixty years of age, tidily dressed in dark clothes suited to a petty tradesman or a servant out of livery. There was something, however, in the cut of his long overcoat which indicated that he had been a retainer in some stylish household. His contracted features showed that his sufferings before death had been very great. After receiving the blow dealt him by Châteaubrun, this man must have struggled against frightful pain, and have clung to his seat in order to fulfil his mission to the end; or perhaps his companion, after having held him up a long time, had been forced by fatigue to let him fall. It seemed as if he had died in the avenue, for there were signs that he had rolled upon the ground in violent convulsions, tearing up tufts of grass with his hands. There was very little blood to be seen, only a thin red line on his cheek; and although his features were contracted it could not be said that he was disfigured. Châteaubrun and Sartilly, motionless and mute, gazed at the corpse, which seemed to fix its glassy open eyes upon them. To the viscount the dead man's face recalled the fantastic apparition that had disturbed him during his duel near the pond at Auteuil. Yes, it was the same angular face, the same hooked nose, thin lips, and large white whiskers, which Sartilly had twice seen under terrible circumstances. Only the dress differed. Previously Sartilly had

always seen the frightful old man in shabby clothes—both on the occasion when he had carried the severed head in the basket, and when he had helped Monsieur de Dohna to give the viscount an unloyal thrust. Now, however, he was respectably clad, and his whole appearance awakened fresh ideas in Sartilly's mind. It seemed to him, though he could not vouch for it, that he had seen this man at Monsieur de Noreff's, dressed in similar fashion. This had occurred on the occasion of his expedition to the Rue de Varennes with the chief of the detective service, and finally he came to the conclusion that Monsieur de Noreff's major-domo, Karl, and the deceased were one and the same person. "In that way everything would be explained," he murmured. "Yes, the murderer of the Bois de Boulogne, Noreff's confidential servant, the scoundrel who just attempted to kidnap Jeanne, were one and the same individual."

He remembered the singular impression the major-domo had made upon him at the time of his visit to Noreff's with the chief of the detective police, and it seemed to him that a veil was raised, and that events which had been shrouded in mystery could now be easily explained. However, this was no time for reflection, and the captain recalled his friend to a sense of the situation by asking: "You are sure that this is the man who carried the basket?"

"Quite sure; and, besides, I am almost certain that he is Noreff's confidential servant."

"Our time has not been lost then; but let us return to Mademoiselle de Mensignac."

Sartilly had been reproaching himself for the last few moments for having yielded to a feeling of curiosity, and he was anxious to join his betrothed; still, he could not help casting a last look at the dead man who had carried away with him, perhaps, the secret so long sought for, and he regretted that he had not been able to profit by this opportunity to clear up all the mystery.

"Don't be uneasy," said the captain, by way of consolation; "we shall know more about this rascal later on."

"I doubt it very much, if we leave him here."

"On the contrary, it is the only means by which we can learn what we want to know, for to-night, or to-morrow morning, the dead body will be picked up and taken to the Morgue; an inquest will be held upon it, and it will be very easy for us to learn the result. I will see to it if you like."

"You! you, Châteaubrun! Why, it was you who killed this scamp, and you would go——"

"Thunder! that's true," cried the captain in astonishment; "I did not think of that, I confess it," he added, after a few moments' silence. "However, I have not the least regret for what I have done, nor for the matter of that, have I any desire to be mixed up in a disagreeable police affair; however, I will find means of obtaining information without intervening personally."

"On my own side," remarked the viscount, "I should like this affair to be kept secret; and, above all, I don't want Mademoiselle de Mensignac's name mentioned."

"It shan't be, I warrant it. I will take care to shut the driver's mouth, and no one else can speak of it. We should have done better if we had searched the dead man, for we have perhaps left proofs of Noreff's complicity in his pocket, but upon my life such work as that would have disgusted me too much,"

On reaching the cab, they found the worthy driver standing at the open door, and he called out eagerly that all was going on well. "The little lady hasn't quite recovered, but I think she will be well before long," said he. At all events the wounded girl's condition was no longer the same; reclining on the back seat of the cab she breathed loudly at intervals, and then her breathing became so feeble that it seemed to stop. As it was evident that the wound on the forehead could not have caused so long a fainting fit, the viscount feared some injury to the brain. Whatever it might be, the most important matter was to take the poor girl back to her own house, and the journey seemed likely to be attended with some difficulty. The captain reserved to himself the task of leading the horse by the bridle so as to avoid jolting; and Sartilly getting into the vehicle, they started. Châteaubrun, energetically recommending the driver to be discreet, had sent him back to the fountain with the bucket in which he had brought the water, and was therefore alone in watching the horse. Meanwhile the poor viscount, kneeling down inside the vehicle supported Jeanne, and gazed at her with an anxious eye.

They advanced slowly, and the driver caught them up when half way along the avenue; thereupon he took the place of the captain, who was now able to divide his watchfulness between the horse and the interior of the cab. "How is she now?" he asked the viscount from time to time, but he received no other answer than a despairing gesture.

By a happy chance, they met no one, for it was late, and at that period the neighbourhood of the Champ de Mars was very little frequented after sunset. The distance, besides, was a short one, and in less than a quarter of an hour they reached the bridge of Jena. Another twenty minutes would bring them to their destination. They went up the incline of the Trocadéro very slowly, and with every possible precaution. The driver had identified himself so completely with his passengers, that he seemed to take a personal interest in Jeanne's safety; and he opened his eyes wide when he received orders to stop Cocotte before the splendid gate of the Mensignac mansion. But he was not at the end of his surprises, for the captain slipped five or six pieces of gold into his hand, and he then no longer doubted having had to deal with princes.

Châteaubrun, without losing a moment, gave one of those loud rings that announce either the master of the house or some serious event, and two footmen darted out and approached the cab. To avoid all unnecessary remark the captain immediately spoke as follows: "Mademoiselle de Mensignac has had a fall from a carriage, and is seriously ill." This was said in a tone that admitted neither question nor answer, and then he added: "Monsieur de Sartilly and I will carry her to her room. One of you must go immediately for her maid, and the other must stay here and help us."

These orders were executed with great celerity, the valet who remained showing scarcely any surprise, when the viscount took the wounded, fainting girl out of the cab. The captain, who realised that Miss Georgina must have been with her on this fatal journey, and who had no doubt but what the companion had been an accomplice in the kidnapping scheme, did not confine himself to helping his friend to move the wounded girl, but questioned the porter as to the manner of her departure from the house. "Miss Georgina can inform you much better than I can," answered the servant, "for she has just come in."

"Just come in, did you say?" cried the astonished captain.

"Yes, not ten minutes ago, sir, and she told us of Mademoiselle de Mensignac's accident. But see! there she is coming," added the porter, pointing to a woman who was walking very fast.

It was indeed the English companion, who was crossing the court-yard with as rapid a step as her natural dignity would permit of, and showing signs of apparently violent emotion—for as she approached she gesticulated in the strangest manner, which was altogether contrary to her usual habits. She reached the gate just as the captain and Sartilly had begun moving their precious burden. Jeanne was still motionless and speechless, and her head rested on her lover's arms. Miss Georgina no doubt thought that she was dead; at all events she darted forward to embrace her. It would be impossible to describe Sartilly's astonishment on seeing this woman, whom only an hour before he had caught sight of in the carriage driven by Noreff's accomplices; this almost fantastic apparition amazed him to such a manner that he could not find a word to say to stop the gushing flow of the English-woman's sensibility. However the captain, with his usual self-possession, said to her in a firm voice: "Your care and attention will be greatly needed by Mademoiselle de Mensignac when we reach her room, but just now will you have the goodness not to delay us?"

"My care!" replied Miss Georgina. "She is alive!—she is alive, then, the dear child! Ah, how happy I am!" Her delight was indeed so great that she turned visibly pale and retreated—no doubt involuntarily—a few steps.

"Pray, show us the way," said Châteaubrun, keeping his eye upon her.

She thereupon faced about, and groaned deeply while escorting the friends and their burden to the house.

"This woman weeps in a very unnatural way," whispered the captain in Sartilly's ear.

At the foot of the staircase they met Jeanne's maid, an intelligent girl, devoted to her mistress, and who in a few moments had arranged everything to receive her. The care of the two friends naturally ceased at the young girl's bedside, and Sartilly was just on the point of confiding her to her maid, when Jeanne, heaving a deep sigh, opened her eyes. Motionless and cold like a marble statue, paler than her white mantle, she cast an astonished look around her. Châteaubrun and Sartilly held their breath so that they might not lose a single word that fell from her lips; while the English-woman, overwhelmed probably by the touching spectacle, leaned against a piece of furniture to keep herself from falling.

"Is it you, Edmond?" asked the young girl, in a weak voice; "how is it that you are here? I thought that you had written to me to come to your house?"

"Jeanne! my dear Jeanne!" cried Sartilly, "you have met with a serious accident, but, thanks to God, you are saved."

"An accident!" repeated the wounded girl, raising her hand to her forehead; "it is true. I feel a great pain here, but I have forgotten—I have lost my memory!"

Sartilly listened eagerly, and the captain, who had taken care to draw back into a shady corner, stealthily watched the English-woman.

"Ah, I remember now," Jeanne slowly resumed. "Yes, I received a letter; the surgeon had forbidden you to go out and you wanted to speak to me about—oh, about the sale of this house."

"And you went?"

"Yes, yes,—your carriage came for me ; it was Toby who drove it."

Châteaubrun exchanged a glance with the viscount, who could scarcely control himself.

"And then," continued the young girl, in her sweet, musical voice, "then I went with Miss Georgina."

There came a pause, and nothing was heard but the hurried respiration of the governess and the feeble breathing of the injured girl.

"But on the way?" asked the viscount, timidly; "what happened to you on the way?"

"On the way!" resumed Jeanne, shutting her eyes, as if to recall her memory. "Oh, I remember now—we were attacked by some men who followed our carriage—I was frightened—very much frightened indeed—the horses ran away and then it all became dark—it was night." The two friends were listening with feverish anxiety, but the young girl had ceased speaking. "I have forgotten—I have forgotten all," she finally murmured.

A sigh of discouragement escaped Sartilly, but the captain, seemingly absorbed in profound reflections, did not say a word. Miss Georgina was the first to break the silence, which threatened to be a long one, for the injured girl had fallen into that sudden sleep which ordinarily follows upon violent shocks. "Mademoiselle de Mensignac needs rest, gentlemen, and medical advice," said she, in a tone which clearly signified that the two friends would do well to go for the doctor.

"I beg your pardon, madame," answered Châteaubrun, who had divined her intentions. "On arriving, I thought of sending for the doctor, and it will not be long before he is here ; it is therefore useless for Monsieur de Sartilly or myself to go and fetch him. Pending his arrival we might wait in the adjoining room, so as not to inconvenience Mademoiselle de Mensignac," Miss Georgina gave an approving nod. "And in the meantime, mademoiselle," resumed the captain, "we hope that as you have escaped any accident you will kindly give us some information about this extraordinary adventure."

"Julia will take care of her mistress while we are talking," added Sartilly.

"Then come, gentlemen," rejoined the English-woman, raising the hanging which separated the bedroom from a little parlour where Jeanne habitually received her friends.

The viscount followed the governess, but the captain lingered behind for a few seconds, which he turned to good advantage with true military precision.

"You love your mistress, do you not?" he whispered to the maid.

"Certainly, sir, I do love her—she is so good and kind."

"Well, then, never leave her alone with Miss Georgina ; and if you keep a good watch there will be twenty-five louis for you."

After speaking these words, the alert captain entered the adjoining room, where the English-woman had just sat down.

"Now, gentlemen," she said, gravely, "I am waiting for your explanations."

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," said Sartilly, very much astonished at this beginning, "but it is I who wish to know—"

"What has happened to Jeanne?" interrupted the English-woman ; "well, you have perhaps been able to guess it. The horses ran away ; she was frightened, and in spite of all my efforts she jumped out of the

carriage. However, a few minutes later, the horses became quiet, and I profited by the moment to alight. But I again ask you," said she, looking at the viscount, "what could be the object of a jest which has led to such grievous consequences?"

"A jest?" repeated Sartilly, more and more stupefied.

"Was it not a jest, and even a most unseemly one, to send for Mademoiselle de Mensignac under the pretext that your doctor had forbidden you to go out, and to have her driven by your servants to a distant part of the town?"

"My servants!" cried the viscount furiously; "but it is an infernal trick, and never——"

"Let me speak, my dear friend," interrupted the captain; "you are too agitated, whereas I am not at all disturbed, and can give Miss Georgina all the information she desires."

"I am listening," said the governess, who had now recovered all her assurance.

"Well, there is some misunderstanding in this business that I cannot explain," began the imperturbable captain; "and I can bear witness that Mademoiselle de Mensignac was deceived, as I was here when the letter was brought from my friend Sartilly."

"That's true; I remember," said the English-woman drily.

"Well, that letter was a forgery, mademoiselle, and it seems that you also fell into the snare."

Miss Georgina smiled incredulously, and replied in a bantering manner: "Well, even if Monsieur de Sartilly's handwriting had been imitated, I can't understand how any one could have imitated his brougham, bearing his crest—and, besides, the carriage was driven by Monsieur de Sartilly's groom, Toby!"

"It is all very incomprehensible," said the captain, cleverly assuming an expression of simplicity.

The English-woman listened, maintaining a dignified attitude. "Was Toby alone on the driver's seat?" suddenly resumed Châteaubrun, after a moment's silence.

This question went home, and the governess's prudent reserve was not proof against such an unexpected attack. "I don't know—I did not notice," she stammered.

"I ask you that," continued Châteaubrun, quietly, "because, if there was another person there, it might be supposed that he was the originator of the jest, which I agree with you was most unseemly."

"It seems to me, indeed, that I did see another man on the box," replied Miss Georgina, who was evidently desirous of gaining time so as to collect her ideas.

"It is very important to have a description of that man," persisted the persevering captain.

"I repeat to you, sir, that I did not pay any attention to the matter—still, now I think of it, I fancy that Toby was alone on the box when I alighted from the carriage."

"But other persons may have seen this man, and if you will have the kindness to tell me where the carriage drew up when you left it, I will make inquiries."

"Toby succeeded in stopping the horses near the Esplanade des Invalides, and it was there that I took a cab to return home."

"Thanks to you for your information, mademoiselle; perhaps later

on we may be able to profit by it. For the moment, it is essential that Mademoiselle de Mensignac should not be deprived of your care. We will now return to Sartilly's house, to see if his brougham has gone back there."

Just as the captain carelessly spoke these last words the doctor was announced. This doctor was an old friend of the Mensignac family, and Sartilly had perfect confidence in him, having known him for a long time. His arrival changed the whole scene, as the two friends and Miss Georgina repaired with him to the poor girl's room. The faithful Julia made a sign that her mistress was still sleeping, and, indeed, they could hear Jeanne's soft and regular breathing, and see that repose had brought the colour back to her face. Sartilly watched the doctor's face attentively, and saw him smile when he leaned over the wounded girl to examine her forehead. "It is merely a scratch," said the practitioner, "and it would be useless to awaken mademoiselle. Ten or twelve hours' sleep will be more salutary than my remedies, I will come back again to-morrow morning. In the meanwhile let her have plenty of rest. That is my sole prescription."

"Her maid will suffice to nurse her, will she not, doctor?" asked the captain.

"She will do very well indeed. There must be perfect quiet in the room, so that a number of nurses would prove an inconvenience."

"You hear, Julia," said the captain, addressing himself to the maid; and as he went out he contrived to whisper in her ear: "Think of the twenty-five louis, and never leave her alone."

An instant later the two friends went away with the doctor, who repeated that there was nothing to fear. Sartilly, quite upset by so much emotion, leant on the captain's arm, and Châteaubrun calmly remarked: "I think that we have set our hands upon Noreff's accomplices; and now let us go and see if Toby has had the impudence to return to your house."

## XII.

### THE MARQUIS'S SECRET.

At noon on the day after this exciting evening, Sartilly and his friend the captain were slowly crossing the garden of the Tuileries. It was the middle of March; the sky was blue, the sun radiant, the air warm, and the precocious Parisian spring had already covered the traditional horse-chestnut trees with budding leaves. You would have thought yourself in the sunny South, and the magnificent weather no doubt had its influence on the viscount, for in spite of his paleness and feeble gait he appeared quite gay. "We did well to come out on foot," he said to Châteaubrun, pointing to the gay crowd in the garden; "our stroll seems to have given me new life."

"It must be confessed," answered the captain, "that our drive last night was by no means charming. I quite understand your preferring a walk this morning."

"Between us," replied Sartilly smiling, "I fancy that this delightful spring morning is not the only cause of my good spirits. I went early to the Trocadéro, and the doctor assured me that Jeanne would soon be well. Then, good fortune, they say, never comes alone, and I have received a letter

from a commission agent whom I had instructed to hunt up that 'History of the Province of Normandy.' He has written that he has discovered a copy, perhaps the only one to be found, at a bookseller's shop on the Quai de l'Arsenal, and we are now going there. In an hour's time I hope to have the book at my house, and to-morrow I shall be able to carry out Roger de Mensignac's directions."

"You know," rejoined the captain, "that if you have need of my services for any expedition whatever I am ready to help you, as this very morning my colonel gave me leave of absence for a month."

"Thank you, my dear fellow; I shan't refuse, as without you—without your presence of mind—Jeanne would not have been saved last evening."

"Ah! I didn't make five campaigns in Africa for nothing," said Châteaubrun, laughing; "but since you have confidence in my manœuvres, let me know your plan for to-day."

"Well, at this moment I have no other object than to go and buy the book I spoke of. I think that the fortune of Mademoiselle de Mensignac probably depends on the indications I shall find in this work; and I have no time to lose, as Jeanne still persists in her resolve to pay Noreff the five hundred thousand francs which Roger owes him, and so her house is to be sold in a week's time."

"Thunder!" said the captain, "that is sharp work, indeed, and it would not do for us to postpone our visit to the bookseller's. I only want you to make a little change in our route."

"What is it?"

"Well, since we are on foot I will explain it to you as we walk along. Let us take the quay, to profit by the sunshine, and just tell me about that rascal, Toby."

"Oh! my dear fellow, it was all as simple as possible; he went out as usual several times during the day, in spite of my orders, and very probably he went to arrange that affair with his accomplices."

"The letter to Mademoiselle de Mensignac must have been sent by them at about four o'clock," remarked the captain.

"Yes; he came in a little after five. Then I went out at seven, and after I left he stayed at home, which was contrary to his habits. At about nine o'clock a man dressed as a servant, but not in livery, brought a letter for old Antoine, and my writing was imitated so exactly that my valet was deceived. He was told in this note to have my new brougham got ready as quickly as possible, and to let Toby drive it to the Mensignac mansion. You know the rest."

"Then that little scoundrel, who looked so sprightly, was neither more nor less than an agent of Noreff's! When and how did you take him into your service?"

"I took him about three years ago, upon the recommendation of Roger de Mensignac."

"Of Roger! That is very odd; but do you know that Toby will be of great help to us in our task of unmasking the leader of the band?"

"And how, pray?"

"Because a groom with a brougham and two horses like yours cannot disappear without leaving some trace. They must all now be at Monsieur de Noreff's house, and I intend to go there and inquire."

"Oh! I had forgotten to tell you that the carriage and horses were brought back this morning by some police officers, who found them at the corner of the Boulevard des Invalides. They had put them in the pound



at first, but they afterwards found some of my visiting cards in the pocket of the brougham."

"Ah! ah!" retorted the captain, "now I understand how events occurred. When Mademoiselle de Mensignac jumped out of the carriage, Toby thought she had killed herself. He considered his mission finished, so he let Miss Georgina alight, and then made off to some place of safety, probably to Noreff's house, abandoning the carriage on the highway."

"Yes, that is very probable," replied Sartilly, "and by-and-bye we will consider what course we ought to take as regards the young scamp. For the moment, however, let us occupy ourselves about that precious volume which was stolen from me, and a counterpart of which is about to be sold to me at as high a price as possible, no doubt."

"Agreed," replied Châteaubrun; "but when we have done with the bookseller I have a stroll to propose to you, and on a day like this it will be charming."

The two friends had now reached the Quai de l'Arsenal, and Sartilly looked about him for the bookseller's house. "It is No. 37," said he; and No. 37 proved to be a dilapidated building, on which there was no name or inscription of any kind. In fact, the viscount half thought that his agent must have made a mistake.

"A singular bookseller; he has neither any sign nor shop," said the captain.

"Oh, he is a man who only sells rare books, and his customers principally consist of collectors, who know very well how to find him."

"Well, let us go in and be done with it. But, now I think of it, how are you going to carry away these old books; they must be as large as they are numerous?"

"I'm going to pay for the entire work, and tell the fellow that I will send for the greater part of it to-morrow; to-day I shall content myself with volume seven."

"Then," said Châteaubrun, laughing heartily, "I am again to take charge of that weighty volume which you carried about on the day of the duel—and which that scoundrel stole from the cab. Fortunately I kept your note for Mademoiselle de Mensignac. It pointed out the manner of using the book, which, without proper information, could not be of any use to your enemies."

"I am afraid, however, that they have discovered the truth," replied Sartilly; "for on examining my secretary this morning it struck me that it had been opened by some one, and that the drawer containing Roger's note had been searched."

"The greater reason for haste, then," said Châteaubrun, pushing the house door open, whereupon the friends entered into a low, dark vestibule, where they saw a black hole which seemed to be a porter's room. The captain bravely popped his head inside to ask for the necessary information, and the Cerberus of the house forthwith replied:

"On the third floor, the staircase to the right; and, above all, take hold of the bannister."

The visitors soon understood the reason of this odd recommendation; the boards were so worn out and wormeaten, and the staircase so dark, that the use of the banister was indispensable. Whilst engaged in this ascent in the gloom, the captain suddenly gave vent to an oath, for he had just knocked against a person who was coming down so quietly that he had not heard him. The collision was very violent. However, the invisible

passer-by, no doubt greatly frightened by the captain's voice, did not speak, but speedily descended to the lower regions.

"This is the place," said Sartilly, as almost immediately afterwards they reached the third floor. On a door here they perceived the bookseller's name with the usual inscription, "Enter without ringing."

"So much the better," grumbled the captain; "I don't like staircases where strangers glide between your legs."

They went in, and the viscount at once accosted the master of this strange shop, where books, piled up in columns of formidable height, left scarcely any room to move about. The vendor of these various works proved to be a little man, shabbily dressed, and afflicted with a very bad cough.

"I came to conclude the purchase of 'The History of the Province of Normandy,' at the price agreed upon with Monsieur Signoret the commission agent," said Sartilly.

"But it is—it is already bought," replied the old man, whose cough redoubled while speaking.

"What! already sold?"

"Yes. I have just this moment received the money for it, and I gave one volume to the person who came. He paid me three hundred and sixty-five francs; you must have met him on the staircase."

"What! you have sold this book, and have just given one of the volumes to the purchaser?" cried Sartilly, beside himself; "which volume was it, and to whom did you give it?"

"I believe it was volume seven, and I gave it to a young man whom you must have met on the staircase," said the old fellow, in the midst of a frightful fit of coughing.

"Let us run after him," cried Sartilly; "he cannot be very far off as yet, and——"

"What good would it do?" interrupted the captain; "first of all, it isn't probable that we could overtake him; and even if we did, what right have we to quarrel with him about a book which he has already bought and paid for?"

"Yes, he paid me the full price for the entire work," said the bookseller; "but if you, gentlemen, will give me my price, I may, perhaps, be able to procure another copy for you, although the work is very rare."

"That's not the question," replied the viscount, without hiding his ill humour; "those books had been ordered for me, and I think it was very wrong on your part to sell them to another person."

"Well, sir, I have a principle," rejoined the little old man, drily; "'First come, first served.'"

"Perfectly right," said Châteaubrun, nudging Sartilly's elbow; "and we may be more fortunate another time; however, I am curious to know the name of the collector who has forestalled us."

"Upon my word," said the appeased bookseller, "I don't know him. It was a German who came to me first, and said he had a commission from Leipsig. That was last week, and he asked for a week to decide. It was only this morning that he sent me the money, taking away one volume, and promising to send for the rest to-morrow."

"To-morrow! At what o'clock?" asked the viscount.

The captain shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say, "Do you think that fellow will be foolish enough to come back?"

"What kind of a man was this person?" he asked the bookseller; "perhaps I know him."

"Oh! the person who gave me the order was a man more than fifty years old—tall and strong, and with white whiskers; but the person who paid me to-day was a very young man, and looked like a servant."

"Thank you very much," said Châteaubrun; "I think I know the German, from having seen him at sales, and we shall meet him again, perhaps. Come, my dear friend," he added, taking the arm of Sartilly, who rushed out without paying any attention to the bookseller's bows and repeated offers of service.

When the two friends were on the quay again they walked along for some time without speaking. The captain had not lost aught of his usual serenity, but Sartilly seemed overwhelmed with grief. At last, however, he exclaimed: "There is a fatality in this affair, for this time it isn't Noreff who bought the book—he didn't want it, as he already has the copy which was stolen near the pond at Auteuil."

"I am not of your opinion," Châteaubrun quietly answered. "I am sure, on the contrary, that Noreff is the purchaser. To begin with, he may have heard of the discovery made by your agent, and have wanted to prevent your securing this famous volume."

"Then why did he hesitate a whole week before buying it?"

"Well, when did you find out that your secretary had been opened and searched?"

"This morning only."

"Then, my dear friend, this is all evidently connected together, and everything can be easily explained. Noreff had the book stolen at Auteuil, but he could not use it, as he had not got the key to the mystery. Toby examined your papers on the very evening when they expected to murder you and kidnap Mademoiselle de Mensignac. He could not do it while you were ill, as you were then always in your chamber. Their murderous plan failed, but at all events they have found out the secret of the book. It was not badly contrived."

"Ah! you are right," cried Sartilly, striking his forehead in despair. "And now they have the secret that Roger left me as a sacred deposit. Ah! to think that I have not known how to keep it!"

"Bah!" said the captain, philosophically; "have you not observed that in life, as in gambling, there are sequences of good and bad luck? I myself had been losing money for seven years, but during the last six months I have done nothing but win to a point that I begin to feel disgusted with cards," added the captain, laughing. The viscount listened without understanding the allusion, and his friend resumed: "Last night we were able to save Mademoiselle Jeanne, and that was the beginning of our good luck. Remember what I say to you: as for that old book, I have a presentiment that we shall see it again soon enough."

"But what are we to do now?" asked Sartilly.

"My plan is entirely arranged, I give you my word of honour; but just now I want you to take an excursion with me."

While chatting together, the two friends had left the right bank of the river and reached the island of La Cité. The captain, without appearing to do so, regulated their course, and he led Sartilly past the open space in front of Notre Dame, to a quay now completely changed, but which was then one of the most curious places in Paris. From the bridge of the Hôtel Dieu to the bridge of Saint Michel, where there now stands a huge barracks, there rose a row of irregularly built houses with gable roofs. From cellar to garret came a deafening concert, to which the whole

feathered tribe under the sun contributed. The harsh notes of the large red and blue macaw mingled with the soft cooings of the dove, and the shrill song of the canaries and goldfinches was distinctly heard amidst the din, just like the high notes of a tenor rising above the strains of the orchestra that accompanies him. One might have thought oneself in a South American forest, but in reality this was simply the Paris bird market.

Opposite this menagerie of the feathered tribe, always so gay and noisy, there stood a building the purpose of which at first sight escaped one. It was black, low, and ugly. It was built of stone, and had one narrow window in a corner, whilst in the centre of its frontage there was a large door which always remained open.

"It is here we are going," said the captain, pointing this building out to Sartilly.

"What! to a guard-house?" asked Sartilly, who like many other Parisians, knew very little about the city he lived in.

"No, to the Morgue," answered Châteaubrun.

"To the Morgue! you are surely not going there?"

"Yes I am, indeed, to see if the police have brought our rascal from the avenue of the Champ de Mars." The viscount's face expressed so much astonishment and disapproval, that the captain hastily added: "Upon my life, my dear friend, I confess to you that I have none of your tenderness of heart. If my club killed that fellow last night, at all events the blow fell upon a scoundrel who deserved death twenty times over, and it is important for us to ascertain whether his body has been brought here and identified."

Sartilly, half convinced, followed Châteaubrun without answering him. Judging by the crowd, there were several dead bodies on exhibition that day. A large number of persons had gathered round the entrance, and it was only with difficulty that several police-officers maintained order.

"All these people haven't come here merely to see a drowned man; the robber of the pond at Auteuil must be here," said Châteaubrun; and this reminder of the duel lent Sartilly the courage to enter the place. The room inside was square in shape, and only lighted from the doorway. The walls were green from dampness, and to the left a window, dimmed and soiled by filth, shut off the corner where the dead bodies were lying upon slabs of black stone. Most hideous of all, however, was the collection of tattered garments hanging on long cords—mementoes of the misery that had run aground there, after journeying through the corruption of Paris.

On the central slab, between two bodies found in the Seine, there lay a dead man whom Sartilly immediately recognised. The corpse's white face retained its insolent, crafty look; the mouth was curved into a peculiarly horrible smile; while the glassy eyes had that fixed, stern expression which had fascinated the viscount, and given free passage to Monsieur de Dohna's sword.

"Let us leave," whispered Sartilly to Châteaubrun, who was listening to the conversation of the spectators.

"He was picked up yesterday on the Champ de Mars," said one person.

"Was he recognised?" asked another.

"No; it is said he was an Englishman, killed in a duel."

"In a duel, indeed! why, he was killed by a blow with a stick."

"At all events, he was very nicely dressed."

"And had a repeater with a heavy gold chain, so the recorder told me."

From this vulgar talk around them the friends learned nothing new ; and the regular progress of the crowd was carrying them past the glass partition, when suddenly the captain pressed Sartilly's arm, and without saying a word, pointed out a young man who, holding a big book under his arm, was walking quietly towards the door, merely three paces or so from them, but separated by a row of people who were watching the crowd.

"Toby !" cried the viscount, darting towards his groom, whom he had recognised.

"Keep your place, sir, keep your place," repeated some officers, pushing Sartilly vigorously back ; and, restrained in this way, the viscount had to follow the crowd despite himself. Before he had got clear Toby had made off.

Nevertheless, Sartilly, as soon as he was free, wanted to run after him, but Châteaubrun, always prudent, moderated his ardour by quietly saying : "It would only be time lost ; for, even if you were to overtake Toby, you would have a scene with him in the street, and I think that ought to be avoided at any cost."

"You are right," said Sartilly ; "I don't wish to have the police interfering again in my affairs. I have had nothing but misfortunes since I applied to them."

"Besides, at this moment we have something better to do."

"What is it ?" asked the viscount.

"Simply to go to Monsieur de Noreff's immediately. If Toby is foolish enough to return there, we will set a little trap for him. The Boulevard des Invalides is almost always deserted, and there we may perhaps contrive to have an explanation with your amiable groom without attracting attention."

"Oh ! he won't go back there ; nothing succeeds with us to-day."

"Who knows ? At all events, if we don't see the enemy, we can at least take a tour round the place. I don't know Noreff's house as yet," added the captain, "and I want to see what it is like."

The two friends took a cab at the corner of the bridge of Saint Michel and drove to the Esplanade des Invalides. Sartilly, who had grown very gloomy, did not say a word, but the captain seemed to become more clear-headed and gay in proportion as obstacles multiplied. Still, of these two men, the viscount was incontestably the more intelligent one ; his courage also equalled Châteaubrun's, and, under any circumstances, he would have taken the lead. However, his friend had got into the habit of prompt decision, so necessary in the art of war, and besides he was not in love. Edmond, had his own safety alone been in question, would have retained all his presence of mind and composure, but the thought of the dangers which threatened Jeanne overwhelmed him completely. As they drove along the captain remarked to his friend : "I see it all now. Last night Miss Georgina returned to the Trocadéro to see what would happen after the death of her dear pupil, and Toby went and made his report to Noreff who can't have been very well pleased."

"What ! do you really believe that Georgina is in league with the Russian ?" asked Sartilly, roused for a moment from his gloomy thoughts.

"I am so sure of it that I told Julia, the maid, never to leave her mistress. However, I wouldn't have the governess sent away, mind you ; through her we may obtain some enlightenment as to several mysterious points in these affairs. As for that man at the Morgue, he evidently had no papers about him to establish his identity. Otherwise the authorities

wouldn't have exhibited his corpse. Noreff, no doubt, sent Toby to see if the corpse had been recognised; he himself won't claim it, although, or rather because, this man rendered him many important services."

The cab which the two friends had engaged moved along very rapidly, and it was not long before they reached the Boulevard des Invalides. Châteaubrun stopped the vehicle opposite the Rue de Varennes, at a point whence a good view could be obtained of Monsieur de Noreff's house. "Look," said the captain, "all the shutters are closed. Has Noreff the habit of shutting up the house in this manner?"

"No," replied Sartilly, as much astonished as his friend; "on the day I came here with the police all was open."

"It is odd; and I am almost tempted to believe that he has gone away."

"But it is impossible that a man like this Russian could break up his large establishment so suddenly. He was certainly here yesterday, as his accomplices were bringing Jeanne here."

"Oh!" replied the captain, "when a man spends his time plotting villany, he must be always ready for flight. And at all events I intend to find out the truth."

"How? are you going to show yourself?"

"Why not? The Russian has never seen me that I know of, nor his servants either, and we have no time to lose; for if the house is empty Toby won't come here;" and thereupon without waiting for his friend's answer, the captain alighted, crossed the boulevard, and, on reaching the gate in the Rue de Varennes, saw at the first glance that his suppositions had been correct, as the house presented the sad, silent aspect of an uninhabited place. However, he pulled the bell and soon heard footsteps coming across the gravel of the courtyard. A man dressed like a gardener was approaching."

"Monsieur de Noreff?" cried Châteaubrun.

"Monsieur de Noreff is away," answered the fellow, in a drawling voice.

"Since when? Why, I saw him the day before yesterday," said the captain, with perfect assurance.

"He left this morning; everybody has started for Russia."

"Will they be long away?"

"Ah, sir, I know nothing about it. I do not belong to the house, I only come here to attend to the garden."

"Very well. I will write to him," said Châteaubrun, seeing that it was impossible to obtain any information from this man, and thereupon he returned to the cab, where Sartilly was impatiently awaiting him.

"Well?" asked the viscount.

"Well, I was not mistaken; they all went off last night."

"It is very strange."

"No, not at all; their departure perfectly agrees with my conjectures about last night's expedition. If they had succeeded in kidnapping Mademoiselle de Mensignac, everything had been arranged to take her from France."

"But Toby is still here!"

"They have no doubt left him with the English-woman as a spy, which employment he is accustomed to, as you are well aware."

"You are right; and I begin to believe that I shall do as well to let you act as you like, for I have lost my head, I believe."

"Bah ! you will find it again ; and, since you abandon the command to me, I now decide that we shall go and smoke a cigar at your fireside. I will then explain to you the famous plan I have so often spoken of."

Twenty minutes later the two friends reached the Rue d'Astorg, where the faithful Antoine received his master with almost paternal affection.

"What a good servant you have," said the captain to Sartilly, as he seated himself before the bright fire ; "there are none like him nowadays. However," he added, laughing, "you deserve some compensation for the groom the devil sent you."

While the captain spoke the viscount was making the tour of his room, and suddenly he gave vent to an exclamation which made his friend start and look round. Sartilly, pale and trembling with emotion, held in his hand a book that he had found on a side table, and showing it to the captain, he stammered : "Volume the seventh ! volume the seventh !"

"Didn't I tell you that your good fortune was coming back ?" quietly replied Châteaubrun.

"But it is unheard of—incredible ! How could this book have come here that we just saw under Toby's arm ?"

"We must ask Antoine, for the book could not have come by itself, and whoever brought it must have given it to your valet."

Sartilly was going to lay the book down, to ring the bell, when he exclaimed : "But it is not the same copy, it isn't the book that Toby bought !"

"What ! still another edition ? Why, we shall end by having too many of these famous volumes No. 7."

It was evident, indeed, that the volume so miraculously recovered had not come either from a library or a book-shop, for the binding was badly scratched, the red edges had lost their colour, and the leaves were mouldy, as if the book had remained for a long time in a damp place.

"It is very singular," said Châteaubrun, as he opened the volume and tried to turn the pages which stuck together ; "it really seems as if this book had been thrown into water. Could it be, by any chance, the copy stolen from us near the pond at Auteuil ?"

"Look at the title-page, to see if the arms of the Mensignac family are there," exclaimed Sartilly.

"Yes, here they are ; look at them !" rejoined the captain, showing the escutcheon stamped in red ink on the page his friend had mentioned.

"It is the same copy then, there isn't the slightest doubt of it ; but, really, I cannot understand the matter. A book disappears at Auteuil, and comes back here five weeks later, looking as if it had been drenched in the Seine. I must make some inquiries of Antoine." Thereupon the viscount rang, and on the valet arriving he asked him who had placed that volume there.

"I did, sir," replied the old retainer. "The person who gave it to me told me to show it to you as soon as you came back."

"And who was this person ?"

"I don't know his name, sir, but he was a middle-aged man, tall and strong, and it seemed to me that I had seen him here once before."

"When ?"

"A few days before your duel, sir ; one morning when I locked Toby in the stable, as you ordered me to do, sir."

"Jottrat !" cried Sartilly ; "ah ! now I begin to understand ! And are you sure that it was the same man who came here to-day ?"

"It was really the same person, although he looked greatly changed and very thin. I don't fancy he's happy, sir, and I thought perhaps that he wanted some help from you."

"Did he say if he would come back again?"

"No, sir; after he had placed the book in my hands he ran off, as if he wanted to make his escape."

"Very well; don't admit any one, unless any message comes from Mademoiselle de Mensignac."

When the two friends were again alone they looked at each other in a very different manner. Sartilly, sad and gloomy, seemed absorbed in thought, while the captain's face beamed with malicious delight.

"Jottrat?" he asked; "isn't that the detective officer whom you went to see last evening before coming to my house?"

"Yes, it's the same person."

"And who has been absent from home for a week, after promising to help you against Noreff?"

"Quite so," said Sartilly.

"Then I think I know what I have to depend upon. First, we possess a precious and devoted auxiliary. Jottrat has left his home and is hiding so as to be able to keep a better watch on Noreff, and he will spring upon him at the moment when it is least expected. He has already found a means of purloining that book from the Russian, and he will help us in all the rest."

"Then you think he guessed the importance of this volume, and brought it back for me to use?"

"That was his intention, don't doubt it, and I am convinced that he thinks the case is a pressing one. If Noreff ordered another copy of the History of Normandy, the one that Toby paid for to-day, it was because Jottrat had secured this copy—how we don't know. However, Noreff, since Toby searched your papers, has been placed in possession of a copy of Roger's instructions to you. He possesses now both the book and the directions. Jottrat may have found that out; that would explain his bringing this copy here, his recommendation to Antoine being the same as saying: 'Don't lose a moment. Noreff is going to act on his side, you must act on yours.'"

"But Noreff has gone away!" objected Sartilly.

"Gone from his house—yes; but there is nothing to prove that he has left Paris. Believe me, my dear friend, we must strike hard and at once, if we want to succeed."

"I am ready."

"Let us begin, then, with the marquis's famous secret; and as soon as we know what we have to do to save the fortune of the Mensignacs, I promise you that we will manoeuvre vigorously. You know that I have my leave of absence, and I can go with you to Siberia, if it be necessary."

"First of all, I will read Roger's letter to you," said Sartilly, opening his secretary.

The captain, while his friend was looking in the drawer, had sat down at the table, and was holding himself ready to turn over the leaves of the book at the viscount's bidding. The latter, having found the grey envelope, which he had formerly hesitated to open, began slowly reading the instructions, to which Châteaubrun listened with the greatest attention. Sartilly soon reached the important passage: "Open the seventh volume, and at the nineteenth line of page 119 you will find a sentence which you must read attentively. When you have read the seven or eight lines I



have indicated, you will understand everything, and then you will only have to act."

"Is that all?" asked the captain, rather surprised at the conciseness of the orders.

"No; there is still something more."

"You must go alone where it will be necessary to go in order to save Jeanne's fortune, and on your return you must give it to her, showing her this letter, and I hope that you will marry her."

"Alone!—do you intend to go alone?"

"Oh! I am sure that Roger himself would advise me to accept your help."

"Ah, well, then, let us consult the oracle," replied the captain, beginning to turn over the leaves of the book. It was a solemn moment, and Sartilly's heart beat loud and fast. "Decidedly, this book has been on a voyage," said Châteaubrun, who was obliged to take great care to avoid tearing the paper which seemed to have been first dampened and afterwards dried at a fire. "Here it is, at last," added the captain, gently turning a final leaf; "page 119—that's it."

The viscount did not breathe a word; he waited.

"Line nineteenth," resumed the captain, after a short silence. "Listen: 'In the year 1415, the Abbot of Mont Saint Michel, fearing an attack from the English, deposited the treasure of the monastery in a cavern which he had dug at the northern point of the isle of Tombelaine. This cavern still exists, and, although the entrance of it is obstructed, it is easy to find the place, by following the crosses cut upon the rock. The eleventh cross, on starting from the point which faces Mont Saint Michel, marks the spot from which a flight of steps conducts down to the vault.'"

Châteaubrun had ceased reading, and Sartilly, agitated and hesitating, waited for his friend to speak. "It is perfectly clear," said the captain, at last.

"What have we to do, then?" asked the viscount.

"Why, start immediately for Tombelaine, and without losing a single day."

"Start for Tombelaine! Do you think we shall still find there the treasures of the Abbot of Mont Saint Michel?"

"No, certainly not; and if I had that ridiculous idea, here is enough to remove it. Listen to what follows on this same page 119; it is a very instructive page: 'Half a century later, during the reign of Louis XI, the treasure was carried back to the monastery with great ceremony, on the feast day of Saint Simon and Saint Jude (Oct. 28th, 1465); and it has always remained there since, although very much reduced at present, in consequence of the turmoil of the last century, and particularly the religious wars.' Well, it is evident that the treasure is no longer on the island; but the cavern is still there."

"I have lived in that part of the country, and I have very often been to Tombelaine, but I never heard any one speak of a subterranean cave."

"It is precisely because no one knows of it that the marquis has selected it as the hiding place for his fortune."

"Pray, speak seriously, my dear Châteaubrun."

"It is impossible for me to be more serious. Roger de Mensignac's fortune is no doubt there. He tells you that he has been obliged to conceal it, and then he formally refers you to that passage in the book. To my mind everything is perfectly clear."

"Well," said Sartilly, "that may be; still I can hardly believe that Roger, a man of the world, a Parisian to the tips of his fingers, could have hunted out a hiding-place on a rock in the bay of Cancale."

"First of all, the marquis's letter shows that there have been some mysterious events in his life; secondly, he had the reputation of being a dreamy kind of fellow and a book-worm—which explains his possessing and reading this musty old History of Normandy. When a man reads books of this kind he must necessarily have strange tastes. Finally, the marquis was searching for a safe place to secrete his fortune, and, on turning over the leaves of this book, he came upon the passage which we read a quarter of an hour ago; he had the curiosity to take a journey to the spot to assure himself of the existence of the cavern, and ultimately he made use of it."

"All that is very plausible," said Sartilly, "and yet I still hesitate."

"Let us see," persisted the captain. "Did not Monsieur de Mensignac frequently absent himself from home?"

"Yes, and his absences were almost periodical ones; they occurred two or three times a year at least."

"And you never knew where he went?"

"Never."

"Was he familiar with the bay of Mont Saint Michel?"

"My father owned property in that part of the country, and Roger came there in his youth. I remember going twice to the monastery and to Tombelaine with him, during the vacations."

"Then, my dear Edmond, the point is settled, and the first thing we must do is to pack our portmanteaus."

"Yes, perhaps so; and yet——"

"You may be sure that probabilities of this kind are certainties. At all events, Monsieur de Noreff won't hesitate, I'm sure of it."

"Monsieur de Noreff?"

"Zounds! do you think it was for the mere pleasure of studying the history of France, that he first stole and bought this famous seventh volume? He now knows the contents of Roger's letter, and must have read the sentence on page 119. I warrant you that he understood it, without having recourse to a translator."

"Then he is in advance of us, and will carry off the treasure?"

"Yes, and I believe that is the sole cause of his hasty departure from Paris."

"You are right," said Sartilly, raising his head, "and Toby must have had time to join him; but it is impossible for them to have started already."

"How does one go to Tombelaine?" asked Châteaubrun.

"First, you must take the Saint Malo diligence."

"That takes forty hours to travel sixty leagues. Monsieur de Noreff will not take that conveyance, I'm quite sure."

"Afterwards the mail to Brest, which changes horses opposite Mont Saint Michel, about two leagues away from it."

"How long a time does the journey take from Paris?"

"Between twenty-two and twenty-four hours, I think."

"And the mail leaves here at six o'clock in the evening? That would be more likely to suit our Russian. All the same, I don't think he has gone that way."

"Why don't you think so?"

"For several reasons; but particularly as to secure a seat in the mail

he would have to give his name and passport, and he must certainly not be desirous of leaving any trace of his journey to Normandy."

"Then what do you suppose?" asked the viscount, impatiently.

"Why, I simply presume that this evening he will order post horses, which will readily be sent him at the temporary abode he has selected. These horses will be harnessed to some travelling carriage which he has no doubt removed from his mansion, and by paying his way properly he will reach his destination as quickly as if he took the mail."

"There is nothing to hinder us doing the same," suggested Sartilly; "and even more—to get ahead of him."

"I do not advise it; we had better try to secure two seats in the Brest mail for this evening. If we don't succeed, it will be time enough to hire post horses, though that course might expose us to meeting Noreff at some of the stopping places."

"That's what I should like," said Sartilly, eagerly.

"What for? To pick a quarrel with him? That would be losing our time. When we have saved Mademoiselle de Mensignac's fortune, we can kill Noreff at our leisure. Now, the first thing to be done is to reach Tom-belaine."

"My dear friend, you alone are sensible and composed, and, once for all, I leave everything to you."

"Ah, well, honestly I think you are right," said the captain, laughing; "and I will do my best to deserve the leadership. Have you many preparations to make?"

"No; but I must pay a visit to Mademoiselle de Mensignac before starting."

"Very good; it is now half past two o'clock, so let us go to the Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau to secure our seats in the mail. When we have made sure that we shall be able to start at half-past six this evening, there will still be time for you to go and pay your visit at the Trocadéro, while I go home to pack my trunk."

Just as the captain finished speaking, Antoine entered the room, and said to his master, in a low voice: "Mademoiselle Jeanne has sent word, sir, that she is not quite so well, and that she would like you to call and see her during the day."

Sartilly glanced at his friend, as if to ask his advice, and Châteaubrun gave him so eloquent a glance that the viscount hesitated no longer.

"I may have to leave Paris this evening," he said to Antoine. "Pack my trunk for a three days' journey. I am going out now, and will call on Mademoiselle de Mensignac before my return here."

Half an hour afterwards the two friends reached the Hôtel des Postes, which until a few years ago still stood in the Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau. The mail office was on the ground floor on the right, and Sartilly approached the booking-clerk with a beating heart. He asked for two seats for Pontorson, and upon the reply of the clerk, who sat there quietly mending a quill, the fortune and happiness of his lady-love perhaps depended. "For Pontorson? It's impossible," curtly said the clerk, finally deigning to look up.

The viscount started, and the captain was going to make a remark when the employé resumed:

"For Brest, if you like; we can only book places for the whole journey."

On hearing this, Sartilly breathed freely again, and taking out his purse, he hastily rejoined: "So be it—for Brest."

"You will have the second and third seats," added the clerk, while writing their names.

"Are there three places on this line?" asked the captain.

"Certainly, the vehicle isn't a britska but a coupé; seat number one was taken this morning; see for yourself," added the clerk, pointing to a name inscribed on his register. "Monsieur de Kerity, captain in the royal navy."

As soon as they had their receipt, the friends hurried off, not having any time to lose in making their preparations. They parted outside the Hôtel des Postes, the viscount driving to the Trocadéro, while the captain hailed a passing cab, and muttered:

"It's very singular, but I don't know any naval officer of that name; and yet I have been quartered at Brest, and I have often studied the naval register."

### XIII.

#### PARTING WORDS.

SARTILLY, since the duel which had such grievous results, had been obliged to neglect both his own and Jeanne's affairs, and had not been able as yet to realise his plan of selling some of his property in the provinces. However, he had put a great many obstacles in the way of Jeanne's generous resolution of selling her house to pay her brother's debt. Still, in spite of his efforts, and those of the notary, whom he had taken into his confidence, the day was fast approaching when the magnificent mansion of the Trocadéro would become the property of a stranger. It was indeed already said that a company of speculators would buy it, divide the ground into lots, and open new streets in this deserted part of Paris. Moreover, Monsieur de Noreff's suit against Roger de Mensignac had not ceased for a day; it was conducted with rigour and promptness by a man of business, having been quite taken out of the hands of the notary, Monsieur Calmet, who was suspected, no doubt, of showing too much indulgence to the Mensignacs.

The notary, who never indulged in flights of imagination, believed that Roger was really dead—and had left no fortune behind him. However, as he knew that the sale of the mansion would yield almost double the amount owing to Noreff, and that Jeanne's approaching marriage would amply provide for her, he calmly awaited the approaching hour of the sale, resolving to dispose of the property at the highest possible price.

Jeanne's lover had very different views, and by no means liked this sacrifice. He outwardly approved of it, but was secretly determined to prevent it if that were possible. Hoping to bring back from Normandy Roger's fortune, he trusted that on his return he would be able to tell the young girl of the success of his expedition, of which he had not as yet breathed a word to her. He was also determined, if he failed in his visit to Tombelaine, to take advantage of his stay in Normandy to raise some money on his property there, with the intention of inducing Jeanne to accept it, as if it were part of her brother's fortune. When all this was settled, the viscount hoped that the marriage would not be long delayed.

On arriving at the Mensignac mansion, after parting from Châteaubrun outside the Hôtel des Postes, Sartilly's heart beat fast with mingled impatience and delight. However, the sight of his betrothed, sitting in an arm-chair, pale and depressed, brought back to him the remembrance of the accident of the night before. The young girl's face wore that peculiar expression which indicates hidden suffering; indeed, it could be easily seen by the contraction of her features and the sad expression of her eyes that she was not afflicted with physical pain, but with some grievous thoughts.

"What is the matter with you, my dear Jeanne?" asked Edmond, in an agitated voice.

"Only a little weakness," hastily answered Miss Georgina, who was sitting beside Jeanne. "The doctor has been here twice this morning, and says there is nothing to be apprehended from yesterday's accident."

"Jeanne, 'twas to you that I spoke," resumed Sartilly; "what makes you suffer so? Tell me, I beg of you."

"My heart, my dear friend. It seems to me at moments as if my life had stopped: however, I will try to overcome this grief. At this moment I have not the right to be ill," she added, with a wan smile.

"What do you mean, my dear Jeanne?"

"That I ought to give full attention to my affairs—our affairs, if you prefer it. The notary is coming to-day to fix the date for the sale of the house."

"So you are still determined upon making that sacrifice?"

"You know very well, my dear Edmond, that it is indispensable; and, besides, this large, empty house displeases and frightens me. I have in view a charming little place, in an Irish convent, near the Jardin des Plantes; Miss Georgina discovered it. I am going there with her, and when you come to see us you will be astonished to find us so comfortably settled."

"Indeed, it is a very comfortable house," insinuated Miss Georgina; "and I don't think that Jeanne could find anything that would suit her as well."

"No doubt," answered Sartilly, coldly. "I hope, however, that Mademoiselle de Mensignac's sojourn there will not be a long one;" and then he added: "My dear Jeanne, you know that I love you, that your brother himself approved of our betrothal, and as I must start this evening upon a journey which will occupy three or four days at the most, promise me that you won't do anything, or change anything in your mode of life, before my return. Our happiness may depend upon this promise I ask of you."

"Our happiness!" repeated the young girl, sadly. "I begin to believe in it no longer; but since you wish it, I promise you that I won't leave this house before seeing you again."

"Thanks, dear Jeanne; and I hope, and I ask you to hope also in a better future. I now want to go once more into the library, but in a minute I will return to wish you good-bye."

"Julia has the key; she will take you there, my dear friend," replied the young girl, who had started on hearing Edmond speak of the library.

The maid was continually coming and going about the apartment, often looking stealthily at the viscount. The commission now given seemed to afford her great pleasure, and Sartilly, on his side, had only wished for a pretext to be alone with Julia, who, so he believed, was sincerely attached

to her mistress. "What has been going on here?" he asked of the girl, as soon as he was in the gallery.

"Nothing that I have seen, sir," answered the maid; "and yet I am sure there is something that makes my mistress unhappy."

"You have never left her alone with the English-woman?"

"Not a minute. At about two o'clock last night, when Mademoiselle Jeanne was asleep, Miss Georgina came with me into the little boudoir next the bed-room, and laid down on the sofa, but I did not shut my eyes all night."

"Then what could have happened to Mademoiselle de Mensignac?"

"Nothing but a dream, or nightmare, which must have been very distressing, as this morning my mistress was quite exhausted by fatigue."

"And did she say nothing? didn't she speak to you of what she experienced during the night?"

"No; only when she woke up she spoke some disconnected words about a woman; but I did not understand her very well, and I think she was a little delirious."

"Listen to me. I am obliged to leave Paris this evening, and you are the only person in whom I have any confidence. Monsieur de Châteaubrun has promised you twenty-five louis for watching the English-woman, and I, who know that you are attached to Mademoiselle de Mensignac, tell you this—that on the day she becomes my wife, you shall come into my house with a salary of twelve hundred francs a year, secured by my marriage contract. So be careful, and watch over the Viscountess de Sartilly."

Julia only answered by a look, but it expressed such absolute devotion that the viscount did not add another word to what he had said. He returned to Jeanne, feeling completely reassured. The young girl was now alone, the English-woman having perhaps thought it proper to absent herself; however, Edmond, fearing emotion for his betrothed, shortened the interview.

"I am going, and I depend upon your promise," said he, holding out his hand to Jeanne.

"Return soon, my dear friend," she answered, in an agitated voice; "return soon, for I feel that misfortunes surround me."

"Misfortunes! but then I ought not to go away: I must remain, and defend you from them."

"No, Edmond, no; go—you could not defend me from my dreams—against phantoms," said the young girl, lowering her voice.

"Against phantoms?"

"Yes; last night, I again saw—it seems incredible but it is quite true—I again saw the woman in red!"

#### XIV.

##### ON THE ROAD TO THE TREASURE.

THE young people of this period have no idea of the palmy days of the Hôtel des Postes. A man must be fully in the prime of life to recall the curious spectacle presented between seven and eight o'clock in the evening in the Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau, when Louis Philippe was King of France. From the narrow courtyard there dashed out from time to time

a number of curious vehicles, drawn with dizzy speed by five horses. The passers-by drew back quickly, while the carriage turned to the right or left with a precision that did the greatest honour to the postilions of the time. Whips cracked joyously, and lamps, flashing like meteors, disappeared suddenly round one of the turnings of the narrow street. With the noise and bustle a fuller idea of motion was conveyed than can now be obtained with the placid, regular speed of the steam-engine, and more than one man of fifty regrets the mail-coach of his earlier days.

The vehicles which then rolled over the roads towards the Rhine, the Channel, or the Mediterranean attained their highest perfection in 1847, when they realised the ideal of speed and comfort. On the evening of the day which had begun so inauspiciously, and ended so fortunately by the unexpected recovery of volume seven of the "History of Normandy," Sartilly and his friend Châteaubrun, wrapped up in furred cloaks, were walking along the pavement in front of the coach-office awaiting their turn to take their seats. The viscount was sad and preoccupied, Jeanne's strange disclosure returning incessantly to his mind. Although he had at first attributed her visions to fever, he could not help being struck by the persistency of her belief in this "woman in red," whom he had never put faith in; and now, for the first time, he began to wonder if this phantom might not be some threatening reality. His anxious looks contrasted strangely with the gay physiognomy of the captain, who stood smoking his cigar, in spite of the regulations, and glancing keenly at the motley crowd around him.

"Do you know who I am looking for?" he said, in a low voice, and at the same time nudging Sartilly's elbow.

"No," was the viscount's answer.

"I am amusing myself in trying to discover who among all these odd-looking people is destined to be our fellow traveller."

"Ah, yes," said Edmond, "I had forgotten that we were not to be alone in the coupé: but you will see the person better when he takes his place beside us."

"That's not the same thing at all; one can observe a person better when he does not suspect that he is being watched, and if I could espy my sailor amid this throng I should know him by heart in a moment." The viscount made a gesture of indifference, while Châteaubrun added, laughing: "Who knows? one learns a great deal in travelling."

Chance had that day delayed the starting of the mail to Brittany; almost all the coaches had left, and the throng had largely diminished, as it was now near seven o'clock and night was coming on.

"The deuce take them all!" said the impatient captain; "we shall be the last;" but the words had scarcely passed his lips when a coach drove into the little courtyard, drawn by five magnificent dapple-grey horses, and the conductor called out in a deep bass voice: "Brest, gentlemen; take your places."

Thereupon a tall man, with an athletic breadth of shoulders, emerged from the group, and drew near to the mail-coach.

"No. 1, Monsieur de Kerity," said the conductor.

"Here," replied the traveller, jumping into the coupé with juvenile vivacity.

"That naval officer is very active," said Châteaubrun, in a low voice; "he goes up as if he were climbing the shrouds of his ship."

"No. 2, Monsieur de Sartilly. No. 3, Captain de Châteaubrun," resumed the conductor.

The two friends did not wait to be called twice; the captain, getting in first, took the middle seat, while Sartilly ensconced himself in the corner. The door was slammed to, and the conductor, jumping up above, called out, "All ready," and then the horses started off at full speed. Five minutes later they had reached the quay near the Place de la Concorde, and were galloping towards the gate of Passy.

It was quite dark now, and the travellers had not exchanged a word. The naval captain, sitting in his corner wrapped in a large cloak, did not seem inclined to start a conversation; while Sartilly, in a thoughtful mood, looked vaguely at the Trocadéro, before which the mail was now passing. Châteaubrun alone turned round to each of his companions in turn, and evidently desired to begin a chat. His cigar furnished him with the means of doing so.

"I suppose, sir, that the smell of tobacco is not distasteful to you?" he said to the stranger. "I ought to have asked you sooner, but I am a military man, and imagine that everybody smokes."

"Tobacco does not inconvenience me in the least, sir; I am a sailor," answered the stranger, laconically.

Châteaubrun, finding in this short reply a word he could avail himself of to start a conversation, at once remarked, "Oh, sir, as you are in the navy, we no doubt have some mutual acquaintances. My regiment, the 7th Hussars, was in garrison at Pontivy three years ago, and my company was sent to Brest for six months. I know everybody there—Monsieur de Kersal, Monsieur de Loctudy, Monsieur de Penhoël, Monsieur de——"

"It is twenty years since I was at Brest, and I know no one there," interrupted the stranger, to stop the list of names that the captain was giving.

"But you are going back there now?" cried Châteaubrun, rather disconcerted at being so coolly cut.

"No, sir; I belong to the port of Toulon, but I am going to discharge a special mission along the channel coast."

After this rather discouraging answer, the naval officer leaned back in his corner as if he wished to sleep. Châteaubrun, very much vexed, began whistling a hunting song, thinking of what he could do to loosen the tongue of his taciturn neighbour before the end of the journey; however, he could not devise any practical course, and being himself very much fatigued—Sartilly was already fast asleep by his side—he resolved to indulge in rest. Ten minutes after, the captain was snoring with admirable regularity, while the mail-coach with its tinkling bells went rapidly past the great trees of the avenue leading to Versailles. At times, a light from an open tavern illuminated the interior of the coupé for an instant, then all again became dark as night; but the passing lights doubtless awakened the naval officer, for his eyes gleamed in the darkness, and when once more a flash illumined the carriage he looked at his companions with deep attention.

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"Those horses are worth nothing, and we shall be twenty minutes behind time at the next stage."

"But, conductor, I assure you they have been in the stable since last night at seven o'clock."



"That's nothing to me. Tell your master I shall state it in my report."

"Oh! after all, it is his look-out. Why did he hire his horses out to a lord, who gave ten francs extra to get to the end of the stage in three-quarters of an hour."

This dialogue, accompanied by some loud oaths and a stamping of wooden shoes, awoke Châteaubrun from his deep sleep, and when he had rubbed his eyes and looked round him, he saw that his two companions were sleeping, or seeming to sleep. The lamps of the coupé lighted up a group standing at the door of an open stable. Some men in blouses were going to and fro along the road, and from time to time the motion of one of the horses made the bells of his collar jingle, while the conductor, tightly buttoned-up in his fur vest, with his hood raised above his ears, scolded the benumbed postilions. This change of horses in the night, with the sleeping farm, the white road skirting a dark forest, the distant barking of shepherd dogs, made up a scene well-known to the traveller of former days.

"Where are we, postilion?" asked Châteaubrun, lowering the glass, and putting his head out of the window.

"At Couterne," answered a boy, in a drawling voice.

"That is no information at all," grumbled Châteaubrun.

"If you would like to get down, sir, and stretch your legs a little," said the conductor politely, "this is the moment to do so. These brutes will make us lose at least four minutes here."

"Well, I shall be glad to do so," said Châteaubrun, quickly springing over his friend's legs as the conductor opened the door; and, jumping down to the ground, he stamped his feet, and stretched his arms several times. Then thinking that it would be as well to make a friend of the conductor, he said in a military manner to him: "I see that you have been in the army; indeed, it is very evident."

This remark touched the vanity of the conductor very agreeably. Drawing himself up, he answered with an air of great satisfaction: "Yes, captain, I served seven years; three in Africa as quarter-master of the third Chasseurs. I should often have been in a pickle if the men of my company had been such louts as these fellows here."

"Yes, they don't seem active, and those horses look as if they had been badly used. Did the prefect or general inspector pass this way yesterday?"

"Oh, the authorities do not give us such worry, but it appears that yesterday there was an Englishman here who was going to Brest in a carriage as heavy as a waggon; he had six horses, and lavished money on all sides, giving twenty francs extra to each postilion. You can see now why we have not got any better horses."

"Ah!" said the captain, becoming more attentive; "this Englishman is going to Brest, and is in such a hurry as all that to get there?"

"Yes; and I should like to know what an Englishman wants to go to Brest for; but, after all, that's nothing to me. Still, I mean to scold the postmaster here for disposing of our mail-coach horses, when he knew very well that we should want them, and now there are no fresh ones."

"And how far is this Englishman in advance of us?" asked Châteaubrun, affecting an indifferent manner.

"Oh! seven or eight hours, at the least, and I hope he will soon be farther off still, so that we may not arrive to take the horses he leaves."

"The deuce take your wishes," said Châteaubrun to himself, and then

he added aloud : " At what hour shall we arrive to-morrow evening at Pontorson ? "

" At about seven o'clock. If you leave us there, we shall go to Brest empty, for the naval officer who is with us also stops at Pontorson. "

" Really, that's curious ; but I think we shall leave the coach when the horses are changed, before arriving at the town ; however, my friend will tell you all about it to-morrow, for I have never been in this part before. "

" At the stage before coming to Pontorson ! But there is only a cabin there, in the midst of the fields, and you would not find an inn without going a couple of miles ! "

" Oh ! well, my friend will arrange all those matters ; he is familiar with this part of the country. "

" You are going to Mont Saint Michel, I suppose, sir ? "

" Exactly, to see the high tides, " answered the captain, without expecting that the pretext he advanced would be in accordance with the calendar.

" Ah ! that's true ; this is the time of the equinox, " said the conductor ; " yes, to-morrow the tide will be at its full height. " However, while helping his passenger into the vehicle again, he thought to himself : " What fools these Parisians are, to travel eighty miles to see a high tide ! "

Châteaubrun lightly took his seat between his two companions. Then the postilion, gaily cracking his whip, urged his horses on at full speed. Indeed, it really seemed that he was trying to overtake the eccentric Englishman ahead of the mail. The captain, who had lost all desire to sleep, indulged in all kinds of conjectures, reflecting that the Englishman who was sowing gold along the road to Brest must be Noreff, hastening onward to purloin the golden fleece. The naval officer in the coupé, against whom the captain felt a grudge, was perhaps an accomplice of the Russian, or a spy watching, and charged to get rid of them if necessary. Then there came back to his mind vague remembrances of the Lyons mail affair, of the brigand disguised as a passenger who murdered his fellow travellers while his accomplices stabbed the postilion. At this thought the captain kept his eyes fixed on his strange neighbour, whose immobility attested either deep sleep or a determined wish to isolate himself, for he had not changed his position since the captain's attempt at conversation the evening before.

" Persons who have the habit of watching aboard ship at night-time, don't sleep in that way, " thought Châteaubrun, who began seriously thinking of awaking Sartilly, so that they might both be on the alert ; but the viscount seemed so comfortable in his corner, and was so sound asleep, that the captain, taking pity on him, left him to his rest. To kill time he now lighted a cigar without asking permission, and he remarked that the striking of the match did not disturb the stranger. " Decidedly, we must make him open his eyes, " said Châteaubrun to himself, and he became more and more distrustful.

The vehicle at this moment was rolling down a rapid descent, the horses going at a gallop ; but a slight slackening in their gait indicated a curve in the road, round which the postilion wished to turn. The lamps cast a dim light on both sides of the road, where amid dark masses of foliage there gleamed the large white trunks of numerous beech trees. They were skirting a forest. Châteaubrun, with his forehead against the glass, strained his eyes trying to penetrate the obscurity which seemed to become more and more dense, when suddenly a violent jolt shook the

carriage, and the horses, brought vigorously to the right, made a prodigious bound. At the same time a harsh voice rose above the crackling of the axle-trees, crying out : "Halt, or you are dead men !"

Everything occurred so rapidly that the travellers scarcely had time to note it. An obstacle barred a part of the road, but the postilion had been able to turn his horses quickly enough to avoid coming into collision with it. The coach oscillated for an instant like a ship tossed about by the waves, the right wheel finally going down into the ditch at the side of the road, which was happily not very deep, and then there was a stoppage of a few seconds. Was the carriage about to be upset? Those who had obstructed the route by means of the trunk of a tree hoped so, undoubtedly, for shadows peered forth on either side, and confused and threatening cries were heard in the rear. However, that was all, for the horses urged on by the postilion's blows, and impelled by the weight of the mail, rushed down the descent at full speed, drawing the right wheel out of the ditch, while the left brushed against one end of the barricade. The postilion had either the skill or good fortune to pass just through the vacant space between the barricade and the hedge, and then the extricated coach rolled on victoriously.

While this miraculous escape was effected, a curious scene took place inside the coupé. At the first cry raised by the brigands the captain entered into action with a promptitude which he thought he should not regret ; but in this he was mistaken. To awaken Sartilly by an energetic push, and then to spring at the throat of his other neighbour was but the affair of a second, for Châteaubrun's mind was full of the idea that he was travelling with an accomplice of Noreff's. So he threw himself, without a moment's reflection, upon the stranger, who, not sleeping so soundly as it appeared, disengaged himself by a single effort, roughly throwing the captain back upon his friend.

Whether the perpetrators of this attempt at highway robbery had no fire-arms, or whether they thought it useless and imprudent to use them, and had simply relied upon upsetting the vehicle, at all events the adventure did not go any further. They relinquished hostilities as soon as they saw that the postilion had succeeded in getting past the barricade. The danger was over, but the captain's situation was extremely unpleasant. Still stupefied by the quick and pacific termination of this attack, and vexed also at being so roughly pushed, he was at a loss to know how to get out of his difficulty. Sartilly, aroused from a sound sleep so suddenly, understood nothing whatever of the affair, and the naval officer was certainly the most calm and least astonished of the three travellers, for he carefully shut the window, pulled up his coat collar, and again prepared to resume his nap, or, at least, to resume his apathy. However, the captain could contain himself no longer.

"Zounds ! sir, you have great presence of mind," he said, in a half-angry, half-imperative tone.

"And you," answered the naval officer, "permit me to tell you so, you have a very disagreeable way of waking up ; persons are not to be strangled in that manner, and it is fortunate for me that I have a strong arm."

"I don't know how it happened," muttered the captain, resolving to make a full apology. "But at the first moment I thought we were upset, and I foolishly clung to you, sir. However, I trust you will forgive me for my involuntary violence."

This courteous speech seemed to make very little impression upon the naval officer, who merely bowed without answering. However, Châteaubrun would not be baffled, and so he said :

"It appears that I was mistaken, and took a night attack for an accident to the coach."

"But how is it possible," asked Sartilly, "that at this period, and in the richest and most populous part of France, a mail-coach can be stopped on the road? It is really incredible."

"The fact is," replied the captain, "that I had very little idea of such a thing on a road in lower Normandy; for if I am not mistaken we must be near Alençon."

"I am almost tempted to believe that those fellows had some grudge against us," continued the viscount, struck, in his turn, by the idea that already possessed his friend, "for I cannot imagine a band of brigands attacking us only forty leagues from Paris; still, perhaps they merely wished to delay us."

Châteaubrun, wishing to stop Sartilly's over-confidential conversation, nudged his elbow. However, the naval officer, who had perfectly understood what was said, remarked: "I don't know, sir, if there are any persons sufficiently interested in the failure of our journey to risk their lives by a night attack; but as far as regards myself, I am sure that no one will take up arms to prevent my discharging my duties as an inspector of fisheries on the coast."

"It is absurd, indeed, my dear Sartilly," cried the captain, "and this gentleman is right in ridiculing the idea; how could two Parisians have any enemies in the department of the Orne?"

"All the same, this attack must have had some cause," murmured the obstinate viscount.

"I can see but one which, if not probable, is at least possible," said the naval officer, after an instant's silence. "You know, gentlemen, that at this time there is a deal of trouble in France, owing to the high price of grain, and as the sufferings of the poor are very great from this cause, perhaps some famished peasants took it into their heads to become brigands for one night."

"That's a very good idea," said Châteaubrun, "and all might be easily explained in that way. Those poor devils merely wanted to overturn the carriage to rob us, and had no intention of committing murder."

Sartilly shook his head, and did not seem in the least convinced, while the naval officer, no doubt thinking that he had talked enough, drew back into his corner, and did not open his mouth again.

The horses continued to gallop on at full speed, the attack having this result that they reached the next stage in half the time that the conductor had calculated. The horizon in the east was brightening, and by the pale light of daybreak one could see the low houses of a long village lining both sides of the road. Two or three of the inhabitants were quietly smoking their morning pipes, and the silver-braided, three-cornered hat of a gendarme peered out of a stable door, from which came the post-horses, already harnessed for changing. Evidently the news of the attempt upon the mail-coach had not reached this quiet village.

Sartilly and Châteaubrun lowered the glasses, and inquisitively popped their heads out of the carriage to hear what the conductor would say about the attempted robbery to the gendarme, who with his yellow belt and straps, represented the government. However, the voice of the

postilion was first heard, and although his remark had no relation to the events of the night, it made our two friends start. "Look," cried the fortunate lad, who had so skilfully avoided the barricade, "his lordship has not been as lucky as ourselves. There is his berline with a broken wheel."

The captain's mind was fully engrossed with Noreff's movements, and on hearing this he jumped lightly to the ground to ascertain what had happened to the travelling carriage which, to his idea, must have carried their enemy. The conductor, had already begun an animated colloquy with the gendarme, and was probably telling him about the attack upon the coach, for the soldier made numerous gestures of surprise and indignation. However, the captain, thinking there was very little new to learn by listening to their talk, started a chat on his own account with the postilion. Slipping a five franc piece into his hand, and, going straight to the point, he said to him: "That broken carriage is the one you drove yesterday, is it not?"

"Oh, to be sure; there can be no mistake about it, as traps of that kind very seldom pass this way; that one is furnished inside like a bedroom."

Châteaubrun, drawing near to the disabled vehicle, saw that it was one of those carriages built for long journeys, and embracing all the comforts of refined life. "Ah, only a cosmopolitan Russian could have so perfect a carriage as this built," he murmured, stooping down to examine the springs. During his inspection Sartilly had time to alight, and he came up at the very moment when the captain said: "Now, I'm sure of what I am about," in fact he had just read upon the iron band of the axle-tree the name of a well-known carriage-maker at Vienna. "Look, my dear friend," he added to the viscount; "you see I judged rightly—it is Monsieur de Noreff who is travelling with such speed ahead of us?"

"But, since one wheel of his carriage is broken, he cannot have continued his voyage!"

"Ah," said the postilion who was to drive the mail during the next stage, "a little matter like that wouldn't stop the Englishman, and he is far on his journey by now."

"But how did he travel after the accident?" asked Châteaubrun.

"I will tell you how it happened," replied the lad, who had seen a silver coin fall into his comrade's hand, and who, like a true Norman, hoped for a similar windfall.

"Be quick, then!" said the captain, displaying another five franc piece between his fingers.

"Well, I was driving the Englishman when that hind wheel broke, about half-an-hour after we had left here. Ah, he's a sharp man; he neither swore nor stormed, but spoke to his servant in a dialect that the devil himself could not have understood, and then he said to me in real French: 'Is there a carriage for sale anywhere in the village?'"

"'Yes,' said I; 'there's the old notary's carriage; but he wants forty pistoles for it, and it is fully fifteen years since he bought it at the fair at Caen.'"

"'Thirty francs for you if you bring it here within an hour's time; my servant will go with you and pay the money, and I will wait for you here.' Well, I went precious fast, but the notary——"

"Ah! I understand, he drove a hard bargain; but how did it end?" asked Châteaubrun.

"It ended by my lord getting the carriage, and I my thirty francs."

"And he went on with the post-horses?"

"Yes, and briskly, too, I warrant you; he pays well enough to travel at the rate of four leagues an hour, and I'll wager that he is already beyond Saint Hilaire. He must be nicely jolted though, for the notary's trap isn't worth much."

Châteaubrun and Sartilly exchanged glances of consternation — the viscount particularly not being able to hide his agitation; and the captain, judging it useless to let the villagers see their anxiety, took his friend by the arm, and returned to the coach. "Why despair?" he whispered in his ear; "our situation was much worse yesterday morning, when we had not yet recovered volume seven."

"Please take your places, gentlemen," now said the conductor; "we are already thirty-five minutes behind time."

"All right, but how about our robbers?" asked Châteaubrun, climbing into the coupé.

"I have sent to inform the commander of the gendarmes, and have given your names for the report. The gendarme here said it was no doubt the work of some half-starved persons living about three leagues away, and who are suffering from want of bread, and he wanted me to go with him to the mayor. 'Oh no!' said I, 'what would become of my despatches!' But make haste, postilion, and I will treat you to a drink when we get to the end of the stage."

"I won't refuse it, the day has not begun badly with me," replied the postilion, and he again saluted the passenger who had given him the five franc piece.

"Tell me," now asked the captain out of the carriage window, "did my lord take his servant with him?"

"No danger of his leaving him on the road; he's a little fellow, very young, but as sharp and as cunning as a monkey," answered the Norman, punctuating this remark with a cut of the whip which sent the horses off at a gallop.

The naval officer had not moved; he seemed to be a man who could travel through France without once alighting or opening his mouth; and Châteaubrun, despairing of drawing another word from him, began to look upon him as a package of goods needing no attention. Moreover, the captain had other people to occupy his mind, for he no longer doubted but what Noreff was ahead of them with Toby, and the important question was to know if the Russian would be able to keep in advance, and how he would profit by it. Châteaubrun was not acquainted with Normandy, and was thus unable to combine a plan of action in advance. He must wait until he and his friend were alone, to gain some information of the part they were bound to; and, thinking it better to rest both body and mind pending the time for action, he fell asleep again.

Sartilly, since the conversation he had heard at the previous stage, considered all hope lost, and gradually subsided into a state of discouragement. Motionless in his corner, he gave himself up to gloomy ideas, and physical and mental depression at last threw him into a sleep as deep as his friend's.

When the captain awoke he was surprised to see that the day was declining; having fallen asleep early in the morning, he could scarcely realise that he had been sleeping more than twelve hours; but he could not doubt it, when he saw the last rays of the setting winter's sun. The horses at this moment were going up a steep hill, the conductor walking beside them,

smoking his pipe. Suddenly on the right side of the road an unexpected prospect was offered. The country in its general aspect was woody, and intersected by meadows. In the foreground, a narrow river flowed like a black ribbon through bluish sand; a short way off one could see a modern white château, while still further on the summit of the hill appeared crowned by lofty trees. The high mountains of southern latitudes did not figure in this quiet but lovely landscape; however, the harmony of the picture was such that it struck the captain, who as a rule did not care much for the beauties of nature.

His two companions were seemingly asleep; and wishing to gain some information, he put his head out of the window, and called out: "Where are we now?"

The conductor hastened to answer, with an eagerness that announced the near termination of the journey, just as the politeness of porters announces the first day of the year, the time for receiving a gratuity being close at hand. "We are almost there, sir," he said in an insinuating manner. "Do you still think of alighting before arriving at Pontorson?"

"Shall we soon arrive at the cabin where you change horses?"

"In twenty minutes, or half an hour at the most. We last changed horses at Ducey, and when we reach the top of this hill of Pont-au-Bault, you will be able to see Mont Saint Michel."

Châteaubrun, turning round, saw that Sartilly was still sleeping, but that the naval officer's eyes were wide open; and thinking that it would not be advisable to ask too many questions before his travelling companion, he merely said: "We shall leave you when you change horses, and afterwards we shall find some means of managing affairs."

"I will recommend you to the stable-boy," said the conductor, who had his fee in view; "and I think he will be able to take you to a tavern."

At the moment he finished speaking these words, the mail reached the top of the hill, and a singular panorama was spread before the astonished eyes of Châteaubrun. It was high tide, and an immense sheet of grey unruddied water extended to the horizon, bounded by a long line of cliffs, to which the distance gave a pale blue hue. There was nothing sea-like about the appearance of this bay, without waves and sails. The meadows and trees formed capes and creeks along the margin of this peaceful lake, and the ocean seemed to have strayed into the fields. Two things, however, broke the monotony of the melancholy picture, for two isolated rocks rose up in the middle of this lake—rocks left, it is said, when the Norman shore was separated by the Deluge from the archipelago of Jersey. The larger one, which appeared on the left, had the form of a pyramid, with a wonderful pile of Gothic buildings rising towards the sky; while the other, low, gloomy, and deserted, stretched along, looking like a stranded ship. A transparent haze enveloped the singular landscape, lending it a sad, uncertain, soft colour. "There is Mont Saint Michel," now said the polite conductor, pointing to the monumental rock.

"And what is the name of that other dark island there?" asked Châteaubrun, who, at this moment, had other preoccupations than the architecture of the Middle Ages.

"That's Tombelaine," answered the conductor, who was already climbing to his seat. The next moment the postilion whipped up his horses, and, at the first turn of the road, the view could no longer be described.

The captain's conversation had succeeded in arousing Sartilly, who, much refreshed by his long sleep, gave his friend a significant glance, and

began his preparations for leaving the coach, while the taciturn naval officer gazed with indifference at the tufts of broom that bordered the road. Châteaubrun, thinking this a propitious moment to make a last attempt to loosen the tongue of the stranger, said in a free and easy way: "I regret, sir, giving you the trouble of answering me again, but before leaving I wish to renew my apologies for my conduct last night. My friend, the Viscount de Sartilly, and myself, Captain de Châteaubrun, hope to meet you again at some future time in Paris."

This remark did not appear to please the naval officer very much; in fact, it only drew from him this evasive answer:

"I very seldom go to Paris, and still more rarely into society; still, gentlemen, I shall be happy to meet you again, if the chances of my wandering life allow it."

"We are going to alight at the next stage, and you stop at the one beyond, I believe," said the captain; "so perhaps we may meet again at Mont Saint Michel?"

This rather direct question did not seem to please the stranger, for he immediately changed the subject, and began speaking of the night's events. Châteaubrun, convinced that he could draw nothing but commonplace remarks from this impenetrable man, soon let the talk drop, and each of the passengers again became engrossed with his own reflections.

After a series of ascents and descents, which proved the fondness of engineers in former times for following straight lines, the mail-coach reached the summit of a high hill, from which one could see a hamlet, composed of some twenty thatched houses; then the road descended into a valley, to mount again half a league further on. On the declivity opposite, Châteaubrun thought he saw some men and horses in motion, and although the daylight was already waning, the group stood out on the white ridge of the road.

"It is there they change horses, I presume," said the captain, "and I think the conductor was right, for I do not see the least sign of a house. We would have done better to have stopped at the little village we have just passed through."

"I know the country," said Sartilly, "and think we shall find a sleeping place somewhere about."

"Amen!" answered Châteaubrun, philosophically; "and, after all, the nights are not very cold in the month of March."

The captain's military eyesight had not deceived him; it was really the post-horses waiting for them on the road; and in a few minutes the team in use, scenting the stable, ran rapidly down the descent, and drew up beside their substitutes at the edge of the road.

"Here we are, gentlemen," cried the conductor, springing to the ground, and proceeding to open the boot which contained the travellers' baggage. The naval officer looked around him attentively, without opening his mouth, and bowed coldly to his companions, the captain, who was quite discouraged by his last attempt, making no further effort at politeness.

"Ho! Jean," said the conductor to a young fellow of eighteen or twenty, wearing a brown woollen cap and wooden shoes, "here are two gentlemen who are going to Mont Saint Michel; will you take them there?"

"Yes, I'm agreeable," said the peasant, in a drawling voice; "but not to-night; there's danger."

"Very well; arrange with them and you will be well paid, never fear,"



added the conductor, who had just pocketed a large fee. "Thank you very much, gentlemen," he resumed, bowing to the travellers; "if they ask in Paris for your evidence as to last night's affair, I hope you will be kind enough to give it."

"Willingly," said Sartilly, handing the conductor his card.

A minute later the mail-coach started off along the road to Pontorson; and the two friends remained alone with the postilion and the young fellow with the wooden shoes, who was looking at them. "Let us see," said Châteaubrun, "where are we?"

"At Bois Chicot," answered the young peasant, pointing to a wide avenue of oak trees at the other side of the road.

"Is it a village?"

"Oh, no, the village is half a league from here."

"There is a château, then; take us there, and we shall find some one to speak to."

"Ah, but you see in the winter there is no one there but the gardener," replied the young fellow, twirling his woollen cap between his fingers.

"Well, let us try something else. Is it far to Mont Saint Michel?"

"It is a good league and a half from here to the shore, and then a good league afterwards over the strand."

"That isn't the most interesting thing to know at this moment," said Sartilly. "At what hour is high tide to-night?"

"At seven o'clock," replied the peasant, unhesitatingly; "it is to-day one has the great rise in the water."

"So it will be low tide to-night at about one o'clock."

"Yes; but no one will take you to the Mont before daylight in a tide like this one."

"At what time shall we be able to go over to-morrow?"

"You might arrive at the Mont at about twelve o'clock; but you must be very early down at the shore, to follow the tide as it goes down."

"Is there a tavern near the shore?" asked the captain.

The lad began laughing, and after a moment replied: "There's the cabin of the coastguard officers."

"That will do very well; and we will give you twenty francs to take us there this evening."

The peasant scratched his ear, seeming pleased by the prospect of this reward, which went far beyond his most ambitious dreams, and yet hesitating. However, he ended by saying, timidly: "I am left here to take care of the stable, and then there's no moon to-night, and the roads are very bad."

"What! a big fellow like you afraid of walking about at night? Come, let's be off; the postilion will take care of the stable for five francs, which I am going to give him."

Pride, and, above all, the prospect of the reward gained the mastery, and the Norman began taking the travellers' luggage into the shed which answered as a habitation for himself and his horses.

"What do you think of my idea?" asked the captain of his friend.

"It seems to me the only practicable one; by sleeping this evening on the shore we can go to Tombelaine and return between the two tides."

"Well, then, we must not lose the opportunity. De Noreff isn't far off, I am sure of it."

Their guide was now waiting on the road; it was quite dark, the sky was as black as ink, and a violent west wind was blowing. "Let's be off,"

said Châteaubrun, gaily flourishing his cane, while Sartilly, still gloomy, followed him, muttering : " If we can only arrive in time ! "

The guide resolutely started off along a path that led in a downward direction from the road, the two friends following him without exchanging a word. Sudden gusts of wind whistled through the great oaks ; now and then a dead branch fell to the ground with a mournful sound, and the darkness was so dense that nothing could be seen ten steps ahead.

The friends walked on without knowing where they set their feet, and very soon the captain felt that he was walking in a kind of bog, while Sartilly knocked himself severely against a huge stone. " Ah, my fine fellow," cried Châteaubrun to the guide, " where the deuce are you taking us to ? If you begin by losing your way we shall never arrive at our destination. "

" But this is the way," said the guide, very much surprised by this remark.

" What ! the way ? Why, we are in a bog. I am already up to my knees in mud, and my friend nearly broke his leg a little while ago. "

" Ah, sir," said the guide, laughing, " it has rained a good deal this winter, and round about here our roads are not paved. "

" You don't know this part of the country, my dear friend," remarked Sartilly, who remembered the wretched roads in Brittany ; " it is always like this at this season. "

" Not very promising, certainly. I did not expect a wide, macadamised road, like the one from Paris to Versailles ; but if we go on wading through many more of these bogs we shall end by sticking in them. "

" But think that Noreff has perhaps already reached the island ! "

" Oh, as to that, I don't believe that that cursed Russian has had any better luck than we have had, and I don't despair of finding him sticking in some mud-hole. "

Sartilly, not in the least reassured by this sally, shook his head again, saying : " Let us try to proceed. "

It was not an easy thing to manage, and one must have known the rough roads and paths of Brittany at that time to form an idea of the situation of these two Parisians. All along the joint frontier of Brittany and Normandy the fields are invariably enclosed by monstrous hedges, or rather embankments, surmounted by trees and brambles ; and skirting these fortifications are narrow paths that answer very well for the locomotion of the peasants. In summer these shaded walks have all the charm of English lanes, as the oaks and venerable beech-trees form a dome of leafy branches overhead, and one may walk whole hours between two walls of verdure and wild-flowers ; but in winter the flowery path is changed into a morass, and the pale western sun is powerless to dry the water collected in these deep ravines.

However determined the two friends might be, they began to realise that they had not sufficient strength to struggle with the difficulties of such a road. Sartilly, although a sportsman, had for a long time lost the habit of taking fatiguing walks, while Châteaubrun, an excellent horseman, confessed that he was worth nothing on foot. Besides, neither of them had taken the precaution of properly equipping himself for such an excursion, and after trying to get along for half an hour or so, they acknowledged that it was impossible to proceed. The captain was first to confess his inability ; but he made this acknowledgment by addressing a formidable volley of oaths to his guide. " Ah, what a rascal you are ! " he cried

to him. "You dare to say that you are in a path—a real path—a path for men!"

"Upon my life, there is no other path to go to the Mont," said the frightened young fellow, moving as far as possible from the reach of Châteaubrun's arm.

"Don't abuse the lad," said Sartilly, in a low voice to him; "he might run away, and what could we do then?"

"Zounds! I know that, but what can we do as it is? I declare that it is impossible for me to go any further through these pools. First of all, it will end by our breaking our limbs, and then Noreff will be able to operate at his ease."

"Let us see; there is perhaps another way; we might leave the road and cross the fields."

"That's a good idea; do you hear, little one, can we reach the shore by crossing the fields?"

"If it were daylight, I wouldn't say no; but in this weather we might lose ourselves; and then there are the pools."

"Ah! more pools, eh? Oh, what a cursed country," growled Châteaubrun.

"Come, my fine fellow," said Sartilly to the guide, wishing to reassure him and encourage him at the same time, "if you can take us by an easier road to the cabin of the coastguard officers, I will give you forty francs instead of twenty."

"I'll try, gladly; but if we meet with any misfortune, I won't bear the blame, that's sure."

"All right," said the captain; "nothing worse can happen to us than being drowned in a mud-hole. Let's leave here, at all events, and get ahead."

The guide, excited by the prospect of a greater reward, begged the friends to wait for a moment while he found some way out of this muddy path.

"I hope he won't leave us here," said Châteaubrun, whom the disastrous beginning of the expedition had put into a very bad humour.

"No danger of that," answered Sartilly; "these Bretons are too fond of making money;" and he was right in his opinion, for the guide soon reappeared, having discovered an opening in the hedge that overhung the path. He at once conducted the two friends through the thorny gap into the neighbouring field.

"This is better," said Châteaubrun, stamping on the dry grass; "now that we are in the fields, we shall be able to make up for lost time."

It was too dark for the captain to see the peasant shrug his shoulders, but he heard Sartilly murmur: "Level ground is scarce here, and we are not at the end of our difficulties."

The viscount was not far from the truth, for thirty steps further on there was another hedge to climb over, which was not done without difficulty, or without incurring a few scratches; then after stepping on level ground and walking on for five minutes, another thorny steep presented itself equally difficult to cross. For more than an hour Châteaubrun was heroic, never complaining of the scratches on his face and hands; but climbing over the hedges with the ardour of a soldier making an assault; however, after crossing one prickly barrier in which he nearly had his eye put out by a thorn, he could not help swearing energetically. "How long are we to go on with this exercise?" he cried out to the guide.

"Not very long," said the lad. "I think we are not very far from Brêtèche now, and from there to the shore it is all marsh."

"Ouf ! what sport," cried Châteaubrun, wiping his forehead, "it is a real steeple-chase, and we only want a river."

"I think we shall meet more than one of them," said Sartilly, but in a low voice, for, having heard their guide's remark, he did not wish to discourage his friend.

The country indeed soon changed in appearance ; the fields were larger, and the hedges became scantier. But very soon the captain, who had imprudently taken the lead, uttered a loud imprecation, for in attempting to jump over an embankment he had fallen into a pool, from which he had a deal of trouble to extricate himself. "It is one of the pools of stagnant water that are numerous about here," said the guide quietly.

Châteaubrun was obliged to bear up under this new misfortune, and, wet to the skin, he walked on in a fury, disdaining to speak. The guide had changed his tactics, for, after crossing a field, he sounded the sides of the pools with his stick until he found a safe place to cross, the friends jumping after him. He was often obliged to walk a long time along the sloping banks before he could leap securely into the next field ; and these prudent precautions had the serious inconvenience of almost indefinitely lengthening their journey, the little party being sometimes a quarter of an hour overcoming an obstacle. And meanwhile nothing announced that their rough walk was coming to an end.

The captain had reached a state of exasperation difficult to describe, and Sartilly had great difficulty in keeping him quiet. Finally, a new disaster raised his fury afresh. The young peasant, who until now had walked on with the assured step of a person knowing what he was about, began to hesitate, retracing his steps, stopping, and looking alternately at the ground and at the few stars which shone through the clouds. "I wager that the rascal has lost his way," said Châteaubrun, brandishing his cane.

"Let's see, my lad, where are we ?" asked Sartilly.

"I don't think the shore is very far off," said the guide, in a piteous voice ; "but I am afraid I have left the cabin of the coastguard officers on the left hand."

"This isn't the time to get angry," murmured Sartilly, pressing the captain's arm. "Let us rather try to get out of this ; there is a hedge of tamarisks just before us, and tamarisks only grow near the shore."

The viscount was not mistaken, a row of sickly, stunted trees bordering a pool announced the proximity of the sea, just as herbage and floating trunks of trees announced land to Christopher Columbus. "A light ! I see a light !" cried the captain suddenly. And, indeed, from a hillock near by they saw a light quite near to them.

"Let us go on," said Sartilly, directing his steps towards it.

The guide, disheartened by his mistake, followed without speaking, and in less than ten minutes they reached the light, which was not that of a lamp but a fire. Through the open door of a low hut the wanderers saw a bright, clear flame, which looked in the dark night like that of a volcano. Now and again in front of it there passed strange forms making fantastic gestures. "What diabolical cooking are these people engaged in ?" asked the astonished captain.

"I don't understand it at all," said Sartilly, no less astonished than his friend.

The guide had completely changed his manner ; a knowing smile had

taken the place of his abashed look, and he quietly replied : "Gentlemen, it is some people of the shore making salt from sea-water."

This simple explanation elicited a burst of laughter from the captain, who had recovered all his good-humour upon seeing the hut. "This is all due to not being well posted in geography," he cried ; "I should never have dreamed of their having a manufactory of this kind in this part of the country."

"It is very lucky for us," added Sartilly, "as without it we should have to sleep upon the ground ; these good people will be willing to receive us, I suppose."

"Oh, there is no doubt of that, gentlemen," said the guide ; "you have only to go in."

The travellers did not wait to be entreated, but speedily reached the door of the shanty, which was roughly built of stones piled one upon another, and covered with a roof of laths, there being an opening the full length of the building to let the smoke escape. Over a reed-fire three men were moving huge basins full of sea-water, which the heat gradually caused to evaporate. In a corner sat an old woman, spreading out the salt obtained by this primitive process,—tolerated still at that time out of respect for immemorial custom. This petty calling, which supported a few people living along the bay, required a certain amount of supervision, and the custom-house officers hereabouts had little else to do than to overlook these saltworks, this side of the coast being almost unapproachable to ships. The entrance of the travellers produced very little effect, the salt-makers scarcely turning to look at them ; but Châteaubrun spied out a soldier in a green coat who was smoking his pipe, seated on the only stool in the room ; and the captain, on seeing the uniform, went straight up to its wearer, a coastguard, who rose on recognising a military-looking man. "Good-evening, comrade," cried Châteaubrun ; "you serve in the royal coastguard, I in the hussars ; both of us being soldiers we can understand one another."

"What can I do for you, sir?" said the coastguard, flattered by the captain's familiarity.

"First, accept this cigar, which is better than your pipe, and help us to obtain some supper and a bed from these worthy salt-makers."

"That would be very difficult, gentlemen. It isn't good-will that's wanting, but they have nothing at all here ; the hard earth to sleep on, and some water to drink, those are the only resources of the house. I don't even know if they have any bread."

"Zounds ! must we die of hunger and fatigue, then ? We would pay them well for an omelet and a mattress."

"You are no doubt going to Mont Saint Michel ?"

"Yes, to-morrow, after high tide. We shall want a guide also, and he will be well paid for his trouble."

"Well, sir, it isn't out of interest I assure you, but I myself once served in the cavalry, and I will gladly act as your guide."

"That will do capitally ; thank you, comrade."

"You, youngster," said the coastguard to the young peasant, "go to our station—you know where it is—and tell the sergeant to bring our provisions and blankets."

The lad immediately started off.

"We haven't much at our station," resumed the coastguard, "but it is better than nothing ; at least, you won't be obliged to lie on the floor."

Sartilly, who had not yet taken part in the chat, thought that the time had come to thank this unexpected ally, and also to ask for some information. "Do you think we can reach the Mont and Tombelaine early to-morrow morning?" said he, hesitating while speaking the last words.

"The Mont? yes," answered the coastguard; "but I would not advise you to go to Tombelaine."

"Why not?"

"Because you would have to pass the mouths of the two rivers, the Sellune and the See, and in these high seas the fords are displaced; without counting that between Tombelaine and the Mont there are several quicksands."

"Ah, moving sands; I know that," cried the captain, who by chance had heard of this peculiar phenomenon of the bay.

"No one knows exactly where they are, gentlemen; and if a person has the misfortune to fall in one of them, there is no escape."

"We must positively be at Tombelaine to-morrow between the tides," said Sartilly, in so decided a manner that the coastguard, looking at him in astonishment, retorted: "But, gentlemen, I assure you there is nothing to be seen there—nothing but an ugly rock, where a few rabbits burrow."

"That's it," said the captain, who saw a look of suspicion on the coastguard's honest face; "we have come to secure the right of shooting there, and we are in a hurry to return to Paris; but before going back, we want to see if there are many rabbits on the island."

"Indeed, I heard the owner wanted to let it: and as you are so determined, gentlemen, I will take you there as you wish. I know the way all right."

"We accept your offer," replied Sartilly, eagerly; "and if you have need of a recommendation in Paris, come to us."

The man's face brightened, and he was going to thank them warmly, when the return of the messenger diverted their attention. He came alone, but loaded with baskets and blankets, announcing that as the sergeant could not leave his post, he had sent the provisions asked for. On examining the basket, they found that the young peasant had brought a large jug of cider, some bread, buckwheat cakes, and a bag full of "coques"—a small shell-fish, peculiar to the bay of Mont Saint Michel.

The travellers devoured the bread and cakes, while the obliging coastguard broiled the shell-fish on a bed of bright coals artistically arranged, and the young peasant made a bed with the blankets. Châteaubrun ate with more relish than if he had been sitting before one of his excellent club dinners, his gaiety overflowing in various and joyous remarks. He related his campaigns to the coastguard, of whom he had decidedly made a conquest, ridiculed the dangers of a journey to Tombelaine, and dwelt upon the future rabbit hunts he expected to enjoy there,—his conversation being a rolling fire of jokes and an interminable succession of stories. "It is very strange, all the same," said the coastguard, who had been trying for a long time to get in a word, "but, it really seems as if all the gentlemen in Paris have met here to see this tide."

"What! all the gentlemen of Paris?" asked the captain.

"Yes, one passed by already this morning with his servant. The driver of the carriage which he had hired at Pontorson told me that he had posted from Paris, sowing napoleons on his way like grains of buckwheat."

Sartilly half raised himself up, his heart beating so violently that he could not say a word.

"Posting from Paris with a servant?" repeated Châteaubrun, also having some difficulty in hiding his agitation. "You saw them? What are they like?"

"The master is a man about sixty or so, but still very vigorous, while the servant is quite young, almost a child."

"At what hour did they start for Mont Saint Michel?"

"About ten o'clock this morning. They went as the sea ran out."

"And they haven't yet come back?"

"No, certainly not, for I was on duty all day, and I should have seen them on the beach; they must have slept at the Mont, and will come back to-day between the tides."

"I am stifling here," said Sartilly, in a low voice, to the captain: "let us go out for an instant to breathe the fresh air."

"Bah!" said Châteaubrun, when they both stood on the embankment between the salt pans; "who can say that this traveller is really Noreff?"

"Give me your word that you don't think it is he."

"Well, even if it be he, he hasn't returned yet, so we shall be able to detect him in the act, and wring his neck for him."

"Silence!" remarked the viscount, pointing to a shadowy form approaching them.

"You are taking the air, gentlemen," said the coastguard, now drawing near. "If it were daylight you could see the Mont and Tombelaine, but at this hour everybody is in bed, and the lights are extinguished."

The impatient captain was going to send his assiduous acquaintance off, when the coastguard uttered an exclamation of surprise: "What's the matter?" asked Châteaubrun, drily.

"Why, there is a fire lighted on Tombelaine. I have been fifteen years in the service, and have never seen anything of the kind before."

"Ah!" said the captain, and he added in a whisper: "We can no longer doubt it; they are already there."

"Our last hope is gone," sighed Sartilly.

"No, I never saw a light there before," resumed the coastguard; "it is not pleasant on Tombelaine at night; there is not even a bit of wall to shelter one; and the fishermen would rather go six leagues over the sandy strand than sleep there."

"Well, one thing is certain, that fire did not burn up of itself," said Châteaubrun; "and who do you think would encamp there but smugglers?"

"A strong reason why I should go with you to-morrow."

"Hum! Those who want to hide don't light fires."

"Oh, they are cunning, sir. Who knows if they have not come from the open in a boat meaning to leave some goods at Tombelaine, and to come back and take them to land with the next high tide?"

"But where could they hide themselves, as you say the island is as bare as your hand?"

"Oh! I have heard it said there are some subterranean caverns where the monks of Mont Saint Michel used to bury their treasures."

"Do you know any of those caves?" asked Sartilly, quickly.

"I have never seen any of them; but those scamps may have found them out. One thing is sure, I will take a look round there to-morrow. If one could find their hiding-place, there might be a good prize."

"We will help you," said the captain, leaning familiarly on the coast-guard's shoulder, "and the windfall may be better than you think. Let's go to bed now, and sleep till to-morrow morning's tide."

Sartilly followed his friend, lacking the strength to say one word, and feeling so sure of a disaster that he almost renounced struggling against the fatality that pursued him. Châteaubrun, although annoyed by the sight of the fire, had not, however, given up all hope. They went back to the salt works where the peasant guide had made them a couch with the blankets and they soon threw themselves down before the fire. But the captain alone succeeded in falling asleep, and dreamt that he had met Noreff in the subterranean cave, and had beaten him to death with the casket. His sleep was agitated, but it continued a long while, and Sartilly was obliged to shake him at eight o'clock in the morning. The viscount had not closed his eyes all night, but had frequently repaired to the embankment to see if day was breaking, and he had remarked that the fire was no longer burning on Tombelaine.

When the travellers left the miserable cabin, after paying liberally for the hospitality they had received, they dismissed the young peasant who had escorted them from the stage, giving him the forty francs he had been promised. The tide had now been going down for more than an hour, and, from where they stood they overlooked the sandy strand, their eyes being first directed towards Tombelaine. The scene had changed in aspect; the sea, which on these flat shores runs out with incredible rapidity, had left an immense stretch of land uncovered; however, water still surrounded the two islands. It was a singular spectacle, this quiet, grey water, which an invisible force seemed to draw into unknown abysses. The sandy bottom with its silvery rivers gradually became revealed as the tide retired. A thin haze, which the wind dispersed now and then, floated around Mont Saint Michel in light, grey cloudlets, but over Tombelaine the sky was pure and the horizon clear. While the two friends were observing this curious panorama, the coastguard came up to them; he had been to see his sergeant before starting, and his light, jaunty step announced that he was free for the day. "Well, gentlemen," he cried, as soon as he was within hearing, "are you still inclined to make the journey?"

"More than ever," said the captain; "we are ready to start at this moment."

"Oh, we can reach the island without hurrying. It won't be low tide for an hour; but if you want to visit the Mont there is no time to be lost; there are so many things to be seen there—the knight's hall, the cloisters, the wonder, the leaden steeple, the dungeons."

"We will begin by Tombelaine," interrupted Châteaubrun, hastily, for at this moment he cared very little for Gothic architecture; "we can see Mont Saint Michel afterwards."

"It will be better to do so, for in a tide like this the sea comes back very quickly, and if we were overtaken by it we should have better beds at the tavern on the Mont than on the rocks of Tombelaine."

"Apropos of your smugglers last night, do you think you will meet them?"

Sartilly's heart beat violently while awaiting the coastguard's reply, and the latter little thought he was listened to as an oracle. "I should be sure to catch them if they came by the shore, but I fear that boat I see yonder," he answered, pointing to a black speck on the sea. "It is too far off for me to see it very well, although I have good eyes," continued



the coastguard ; " but I'll wager that that boat comes from Jersey, and that the smugglers are going back the same way they came."

" Here, my friend," said Châteaubrun eagerly, holding out to the guard a pair of glasses which he always carried in a leathern case hanging at his side. " You are more of a seaman than I am, and with this instrument you can tell us what the boat is."

There was a spell of silence, full of suspense, for the two friends, while the coastguard adjusted the tubes of the glasses, and looked along the horizon for the mysterious boat. " It is very strange," he said, slowly, " it is a little rowing-boat with but one man in it, and it has its helm on Tombelaine ; but, with the tide against him, that fellow will have a good deal of difficulty in reaching land before the water runs out."

" Where does the boat come from ?"

" That's more difficult to say ; but I have an idea that it is from Pontorson, and must have come down the Couesnon with the tide."

Châteaubrun exchanged a look with Sartilly, who, turning very pale, could not help murmuring : " The seaman of the mail coach ! All is lost !"

" Look ! look !" continued the coastguard, without remarking the effect his words had produced ; " look ! they are still there, the cheating dogs."

" Who ? Whom are you speaking about ?" asked the captain.

" Why, the smugglers. I see them on Tombelaine as plain as I see you ; there are two of them there. Look towards the southern point of the island ; they are making signals with a handkerchief."

" To the man in the boat, eh ?"

" Yes, to be sure ; and I think he has raised something on one oar. But never mind," said the coastguard, " I think we'll laugh at them yet."

" Laugh !" cried Châteaubrun, certainly feeling no inclination to do so.

" Yes ; the tide is going down so rapidly that in half an hour I would defy the best sailor in Granville or Cancale to land off Tombelaine, and the man who is in that boat looks to me like a fresh-water sailor."

" What will happen then ?"

" Why, the boat will run aground, unless it makes off into the open ; at all events, the smugglers won't be able to embark, and if we do not lose any time we can arrest them at Tombelaine."

" Let's start, then," cried the captain, in a tone of command.

" Suppose I go first and tell my sergeant ?" said the coastguard.

" Oh, no. Come with us. Your share of the prize will be larger. I promise to explain everything to your chief," said the captain.

The coastguard, fascinated by Châteaubrun's authoritative manner, hesitated no longer, but followed Sartilly, and was already running over the sand. As for the captain, he had cleared the sloping embankment in three leaps, and was striding over the shore like the oldest fisherman of the bay.

## XV.

### THE QUICKSAND.

THE two Parisians hastened over the fine, elastic sand with evident pleasure. " Not so fast, gentlemen !" cried the prudent coastguard ; " if you go at that rate, we shall soon overtake the tide, and that would not advance us much."

"Why not?" asked the energetic captain; "the sooner we reach Tombelaine the better."

"Yes, but to get there we must take a safe path."

"We will look for one."

"Excuse me, sir, but you don't know the way, that's easily seen; and if you take my advice, we won't risk our lives for nothing."

"What! our lives?"

"Yes, gentlemen; we shan't be the first who have disappeared in going to the Mont or Tombelaine." And as a gesture of incredulity escaped Châteaubrun, the coastguard continued in the serious manner of an experienced teacher instructing a novice: "You see, sir, in ordinary times we might be able to pass without danger, because then the sea is not strong enough to displace the sand; but in an equinoctial tide it is different."

"The hour of the tide is known, and we have nothing to fear from being surprised by it," objected Sartilly.

"You are right; but if a fog should come down upon us, we should have a great deal of trouble to find our way again. I have no fear of being drowned; I only fear the quicksands."

"Really, really!" laughed the captain; "sands that swallow up passers-by, as one reads about in romances?"

"It happens also in the bay of Mont Saint Michel; and only last year a pedlar was buried with his merchandise on the sandy shore of Saint Genets. He called for help, and was heard distinctly, but there was no means of helping him, as if any persons had ventured to try and rescue him they would have been swallowed up at the same time."

"A still stronger reason for passing over them quickly."

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I think we should do better to let others lead the way."

"What others?" asked Sartilly.

"Why, the fishermen; they alone know the shore well—they follow the sea as it goes down. Look! there's one already half the way to Tombelaine; we must follow the traces of the fishermen's footsteps in the sand, and then we shall be quite safe."

"Yes; and while we are looking for the fishermen's steps, the smugglers will pack off," said the captain, "and the rabbits have time to get back to their burrows;" he added by way of keeping up his character of sportsman.

"As for the smugglers," replied the coastguard, "if they get off, it won't be by sea, for I defy the boat to come near the shore now."

The two friends looked towards the sea, and saw that the guard was not mistaken, as, whether the current had drawn the boat away, or whether the seaman feared running aground, at all events the craft was visibly retreating from Tombelaine, which the sea also was leaving.

The captain's glass was no longer necessary, as they could now with the naked eye see the uneven coast-line of Tombelaine standing out against the horizon; however, no human form was visible, the supposed smugglers having disappeared. Had they hidden themselves, or had they gone toward the sandy beach to meet the suspicious bark? Neither of the friends could say, nor could the coastguard for the matter of that, the rock rising high enough above the shore to hide what transpired on the opposite declivity. Sartilly and the captain exchanged looks of anxiety, and dreaded lest they might arrive too late. They had now been walking more than an hour. It was quite low tide, and

between the two islands could be seen a flat, sandy stretch, intersected by the sinuous course of a narrow river; some little groups of fishermen, looking like black spots amid the grey sand, were all proceeding in the same direction to pass the rivulet, on reaching the opposite shore of which they dispersed on all sides. "They have found the ford," said the coast-guard, "and now we only have to follow them."

"Let us go on, then," said the captain, with a quicker step, "or the birds will have flown away."

Although very desirous to arrive in time, the coastguard did not neglect any precautions. He begged the gentlemen to adopt the system of Indian file—that is to say, to keep strictly in the footsteps of those who had gone on before them, he himself taking the lead and scrutinising the footprints like a Mohican following his enemy, at times hesitating for a second and then hastening on. Even during these short stoppages the Parisians often felt the sand tremble under their feet, the ground having the consistency of paste, and being porous like a sponge.

However, they safely reached the margin of the little river, which was nothing more than a canal, without current or depth, which the sea had left behind it, and which it would absorb again in a few hours' time. Still its bed had an alarming appearance, as, under the water, a glimpse could be obtained of some soft and dark mud, which seemed to hide an abyss. The footsteps of the fishermen no longer being seen, but appearing again beyond the ford, the most important point was not to deviate from the straight line. The coastguard, venturing in the first, sounded the sand with his stick, taking short steps, and five minutes afterwards the little group arrived safe on the opposite shore.

"Now we can run," said the coastguard officer, pointing to Tombelaine, from which they were only two or three hundred paces distant. The two friends did not require urging, but raced to the isle with great speed. Sartilly, arriving the first at the foot of the rocks, began climbing them without stopping to take breath. The captain and the coast-guard followed him closely, and soon stood with him on a high rock that formed the southern point of Tombelaine. From this observatory they could see the whole extent of the island, which was absolutely deserted. The unknown persons seemed to have faded away without leaving any trace of their visit; however, the mysterious boat was still out there in the open, the sea having retreated to a great distance, and a vast extent of sand separating it from the rock.

"It is curious," said the coastguard, "but my smugglers are no longer to be seen. I have looked in vain along the sands on all sides, and can only see some fishermen."

"And the skiff that is still yonder?" asked the captain.

"Oh, the skiff is still waiting for them, that's very sure; and I even think the man in it has thrown out a grappling iron."

"Then the scoundrels are on the island still, and we must find them. As there is a cave they must be hidden there."

"But I don't know where the cave is," said the coastguard.

"Let us look for it," rejoined Châteaubrun, who was walking along with Sartilly towards the northern extremity of the island, while the viscount repeated in a low voice from volume seventh: "The eleventh cross cut upon the rock, upon leaving the point facing the Mont, marks the entrance to the cave"—and as he went on he stooped down to find the crosses,

The captain was the first to perceive a roughly-cut cross on the dark granite, and when he had pointed it out to Sartilly, the latter was not able to restrain a cry of joy. Holding, as it were, Ariadne's thread in his hand, he was now bound to attain his object. The coastguard looked with astonishment at the two gentlemen kneeling down by the rough, imperfect vestiges of sculpture, and ended by thinking they were desperate antiquaries; but he was soon undeceived, for the captain summoned him to approach by a gesture, and when he came up he found Sartilly clearing away with his hands some thorns and briars which obstructed the way to a flight of steps. "Here is the cave," said Châteaubrun, in a low voice, and, without the least hesitation, he prepared to go down.

"And if the smugglers are still there?" cried the officer.

"I hope they are, and if so, I mean to say two words to them."

"But indeed, sir, this is not your business. I have my gun and bayonet, and as smuggled goods are in question, I ought to go in first."

The captain thanked the brave fellow with a glance, more eloquent than a long speech, but at the same time set his foot on the first step. "Excuse me, my dear friend," said Sartilly; "you know that I ought to be the first," and, pushing his friend gently aside, took his place on the step.

"I have nothing to say to that," answered the captain, after a short pause; "but it is not forbidden to make the best of our chances, and I don't see the necessity of going into this hole without taking proper precautions. First of all," continued Châteaubrun, "I like to see when one has to fight. Have any of you some matches?"

"Yes, here are some," said the coastguard, who had nodded approvingly, "and, still better, I have a little lantern in my pocket which I use at night-time?"

"You shall be promoted, my friend, if I myself have to go and ask the minister for it; and, in the meanwhile, I proclaim you to be the best coastguard in France."

"Be quick!" cried Sartilly to the guard, who was blushing with pleasure at hearing the compliment and promise.

In a few minutes the lantern was ready, and threw a feeble light down the dark steps.

"Now," began Châteaubrun, "we can arrange the expedition. You, my dear Sartilly, shall be the first; it is your right, and I will not contest it; only, I insist upon your taking our friend's bayonet in your hand; he will follow you, carrying the lantern. I will be the reserve force, and carry the only gun we possess. Is your gun loaded?" he asked the coastguard.

"Yes, and primed since this morning."

"All's right, then; now I want to explain my idea,—if these scoundrels are in the cave, as I hope they are, we must try to see them before they see us, and it is for our friend here to manage his lantern accordingly."

"Do not fear; I know how to go down into caves," said the guard.

"You, Edmond," resumed the captain, "as soon as you are within reach of them, strike if they don't surrender at discretion; and in case of resistance, I will take my part in the concert."

Châteaubrun's plan was so clear and judicious that neither of the others objected to it, and Sartilly, bayonet in hand, went down, the guard following, while Châteaubrun, as he had announced, brought up the rear. The steps were narrow, and almost choked up with thorns and briars; however fresh breaks in this parasitic vegetation made it evident that the place had been lately visited, and the captain could not avoid remarking

on the fact, in a low voice. "What astonishes me most," retorted the coastguard, "is that I have been coming to Tombelaine for twenty years or so and never saw the entrance to these steps before."

"Silence in the ranks," said Châteaubrun, in a low voice, when Sartilly had reached the last step.

The descent did not take up much time; after going down twenty steps the invaders entered a gallery which appeared to have been excavated in the rock at a very remote period. The walls and floors were of bluish granite, spotted with grains of mica, which looked like golden spangles when the light from the lantern gleamed upon them. Two men could not walk abreast, but the captain, although very tall, could stand quite erect. They walked along slowly, making frequent halts, and looking round and listening, but they neither saw nor heard anything. The coastguard on stooping with his lantern pointed out that there were foot-prints on the soil, but that was the only sign of the smugglers' visit. After going another hundred steps or so along the gallery, it widened visibly, and then thinking they were approaching the end of it, the little army redoubled their precautions. Châteaubrun cocked his gun, and Sartilly wound his handkerchief round the hilt of his bayonet. The captain began to suspect that there was no one there, and, as it was not in his nature to prolong any uncertainty whatever, he quickened his steps, and soon reached the extremity of the cave. It was a room, or rather a circular nook, a real granite chest cut in the rock to serve as a hiding-place for the treasure of the abbey. The coastguard raised his lamp, looking all around him, but the light only gleamed on bare walls, and Sartilly could not restrain a cry of despair, for the hiding-place was certainly empty. "A thousand thunders!" exclaimed the captain: "we have come too late; the birds have flown!"

"But where have they flown to?" muttered the coastguard; "they could not have passed through the walls!"

"Ah, they went out by the same way as they came in, and hid on the island. While we have been marching in this hole like national guards on the patrol, the fellows have escaped!"

"It is still possible that they are on the shore, and we may yet overtake them," said the coastguard.

Sartilly suffered such anguish that he was not able to speak, but he pressed the captain's arm, showing him at the base of the wall two brass hooks, to which was still fastened some of the iron-work of a chest that had been recently wrenched away. It was impossible to hope any longer; no illusion could resist this evident testimony, and the dearest hopes of Sartilly crumbled away under this fearful blow. At the sight of his friend's poignant grief Châteaubrun did not speak, but drew him away from the fatal cavern which had contained Roger's fortune; and the unhappy viscount let himself be led off. The persevering coastguard had not, however, lost all hope of overtaking the men whom he called Jersey smugglers, and his first thought, on coming out of the cave, was to climb to the highest point of the island to try to discover the fugitives. Sartilly and the captain followed him, without knowing exactly what they were going after, and, above all, without having the least faith in the success of this last search.

The scene had changed again—a thick fog, enveloping Mont Saint Michel from base to summit, seemed to be advancing slowly towards Tombelaine, the weather still being clear in the offing, where the skiff could be distinctly seen still in the same place. The sea had begun to

rise ; the stretch of strand had already sensibly diminished ; the fishermen were all directing their steps to the shore just as the seagulls return to the coast when the tempest approaches. "It is time to leave, gentlemen," said the coastguard at this sight ; "the tide is rising and the fog descending ; it won't be pleasant here in a couple of hours' time." Then slinging his gun over his shoulder the honest fellow cast a last look at the shore.

Suddenly, Sartilly, who was observing him, saw him put his hand to his eyes, as if to shade them, and almost as soon show evident signs of astonishment. A couple of seconds elapsed, and then extending his arm towards the sea, the coastguard cried : "I see them !"

"Where are they ?" asked Sartilly and the captain at the same time.

"There down below us, about five hundred paces from here, making towards the pass of Cancale, as it were !"

And, indeed, two men could be distinctly seen on the sand walking towards the sea.

"Bah ! they are fishermen," said Châteaubrun.

"Fishermen ! You would not find a fisherman who would risk his life this side of Tombelaine when the tide is coming in. No, no ! they are our smugglers, and are going to the boat waiting for them. Look !" And, indeed, the mysterious skiff had raised her anchor manœuvring to approach, and was advancing gently, moved by the first impulse of the tide. "Ah, they have been more cunning than we," said the coastguard ; "they hid behind the rocks, when they saw us coming to the island ; and they made away while we were amusing ourselves in the cave."

While the fellow was speaking, Châteaubrun had taken his glasses and was looking attentively at the runaways.

"Oh ! I can recognise them without a glass," said the coastguard. "There is a tall one with a stick in his hand, and a little one carrying something on his back."

"The casket !" cried the captain, in a voice of thunder. "I recognise them also, and mean to catch them, and send them to the galleys ;" and then he ran down the steep declivity towards the strand.

"But that's folly !" repeated the coastguard, tumbling down after them. "We cannot overtake the fellows, and the sea will gain upon us."

The Parisians did not turn their heads, however, but began running over the sand as swiftly as they could, and the coastguard, who knew the danger to which they were exposing themselves, raised his arms to heaven, exhausting himself in despairing appeals. "They do not hear me," he said at last ; "it is vain to cry out, as the wind comes from the other side. I can't stop them," he added in a low voice. The fog was now advancing slowly over the sands, and on the horizon the grey line of the sea and the sky were blended together. "Ah ! well," resumed the honest fellow, "no one shall say I deserted them. So much the worse if we all three die together," and then he began running in his turn, soon overtaking the Parisians who were less accustomed than himself to the wet sand.

When he reached them, the captain was beginning to swear at the soft mud, in which his feet sank at every step he took. "This way, this way," cried the guard, "pass where the sand is ribbed and avoid the hollows."

"That is a good thing to know," said Châteaubrun, who had kept his presence of mind, and who immediately followed the guard's instructions.

The mad race which the friends had run had not been altogether useless, as it had diminished the distance between them and the fugitives. They could now distinguish quite plainly the two men who were running, wish-

ing no doubt to reach the boat ; and, indeed, it seemed as if they would succeed, as they were now scarcely fifty paces from the sea line, and merely had to wade through the water as high as the waist to reach the skiff. They must have known they were pursued, as they frequently turned round, and the elder man seemed to be exciting his companion to greater efforts, both by voice and gesture. The younger one, who seemed weighed down by a rather large box, walked more slowly, the elder often stopping to wait for him.

"Ah, you scamps !" cried the captain, "I am going to pay you at one blow for all you have made us suffer this month past."

Sartilly, who had taken possession of the gun, raised it to aim at the fugitives, in spite of all the efforts of the coastguard who considered this a rather violent proceeding, even against smugglers. Châteaubrun, on the contrary, entirely approved of this way of settling the affair. "Aim at Noreff," he cried, in a loud voice. "I promise you to lay my hand upon your groom and the casket."

However, at the very moment when the viscount was going to touch the trigger, a fearful cry of distress was heard from the strand, and the coastguard caught hold of the viscount's arm, saying, in an agitated voice : "It is useless ; he is going to die !"

Scarcely twenty paces ahead of them, the taller of the two men who were escaping had suddenly stopped short, as if nailed to the place by an invisible force. They saw him moving, extending his arm, and trying to support himself with his stick, but he did not go forward, and his tall form seemed to be gradually diminishing. Stupefied at this singular phenomenon, the two friends looked at the coastguard, who muttered these words : "A quicksand ! He is lost !"

"Toby ! Come to me ! Help me !" cried the unfortunate man, whom the abyss was drawing down by degrees. But no one answered this agonising cry. The groom, having by two or three rapid bounds got clear of the quicksand which was swallowing up his master, was now darting at full speed towards the boat. Noreff, was slowly sinking as if an enormous weight was drawing him into the unknown depths of the wet sands ; the mud, imprisoning his legs, was already as high as his knees. By an immense effort he succeeded in disengaging one of his feet, but the other sank still farther in ; and then he raised himself erect, thinking, perhaps, that by remaining motionless, he might sustain himself better. But death, hideous death, continued to mount, inch by inch, line by line—the mud soon reaching his waist. Then the poor, miserable man thought for the first time, perhaps, that there is a God who punishes crime, and he dared to ask pardon from those whom he had pursued with his vengeance ! "Pardon !" he cried, clasping his hands ; "do not let me die in this way !—it is you I entreat, Monsieur de Sartilly !—in the name of your betrothed !—her fortune is there !—in a casket !—take it !—take all I possess, but save me—save me from this horrible death !"

The wretched man's appeals were more than the viscount could bear, and he made a movement to run to his help—the captain, who was deadly pale, not trying to hold him back. However, the coastguard, throwing himself before Sartilly, put his arms around him, and exclaimed : "You can't save him, you would perish with him !"

The sand was indeed doing its cold and silent work, the mud having already reached Noreff's shoulders and neck, and now only his head could be seen, his features being so contracted by terror as no longer to have a

human appearance, while his mouth, still open, shrieked forth a last prayer. "Have pity on me!" he yelled, "and I will tell you the secret!—I will tell you where Roger is! I will save Jeanne!—her life! I ask my life in return for saving her's; if you let me die, she will die!—for they are going to kill her!—it is—"

But Noreff could say no more; the mud stopped his suppliant voice, extinguished his haggard eyes, covered his bristling hair; then the murderous sand again resumed its treacherous level at the spot where he had sunk, a few air-bubbles mounted to the surface, and that was all!

"God is just," said Sartilly.

"Yes, God is just," cried the captain, "and He won't allow that rascal, Toby, to get away with the casket. Let us run; we have just time."

"To the right, gentlemen," cried the coastguard, "follow the embankment to the right," and then the chase began again with ardour.

During the terrible scene of the quicksand, Toby had gained ground and entered the water, the man in the bark rowing towards him.

"Thunder!" said Châteaubrun; "look at him swimming; he has let go of the casket; I see it floating."

"Let us save Jeanne's fortune!" cried Sartilly, darting forward.

Soon reaching the first waves of the rising tide, he was walking resolutely against the flood, when the coastguard called out in a loud voice; "Come back, gentlemen, come back, or we are all dead men."

Sartilly and the captain turned round to look behind them, and saw a dense fog advancing in a semi-circle and already hiding both Tombelaine and Mont Saint Michel. It seemed as if a huge funeral pall had enveloped at the same time the sandy beach and the sea. In a few seconds all had disappeared from view—the precious casket, the traitor Toby, the mysterious skiff had vanished, like fantastic apparitions, and the water was the only thing to be seen slowly advancing over the sand.

"It is the equinoctial fog," said the coastguard, "and if we value our lives, we have not a moment to lose."

"What are we to do?" asked the captain.

"Walk towards Tombelaine; we shall be fortunate if we get there."

"Bah! It is only ten minutes' walk from here; we must reach it."

"May Providence hear you!" rejoined the guard, shaking his head.

"But we may perhaps have time to save the casket," interrupted Sartilly; "it contains a fortune."

"I do not know of any fortune worth the sacrifice of my life," answered the guard, roughly, "and I am going to start."

"We'll follow you," rejoined the captain, struck by the authoritative tone employed by the coastguard for the first time.

The little group kept close together while hastening along, at first walking very rapidly, and they must have gained ground, as they no longer saw or heard the sea. The sand was now dry and firm; there was neither hill nor undulation of any kind in view, only the fog became more and more dense, and the trio were obliged to hold each other's hands, so that they might not be separated. Once the captain, lagging behind a few steps, was obliged to call out to find his comrades again. The cry of alarm that he then uttered was not repeated. No one spoke, or exchanged complaints or encouragements; they advanced without stopping or turning; and in this gloomy solitude their mute flight was most lugubrious. They ran along for more than half an hour, at least double the time it required to reach Tombelaine, but the island did not appear,



"Why, has the rock also been swallowed up by a quicksand?" suddenly said Châteaubrun.

"Five minutes ago, I still hoped," replied the coastguard, shaking his head sadly; "but now I am sure we have passed Tombelaine."

"Then we must retrace our steps and search right and left."

"Oh! the sea won't give us time to do so."

"But do you think I want to be drowned like a dog in this bay of misfortune? You promised to guide us; do so. If we have passed the island, the shore must be before us. We must walk forward!"

"Listen to me, sir. I have a wife and children whom I want to see again as much as you and your friend want to return to Paris, but upon my word as an old soldier, I don't know where we are, and it is only a chance that can save us."

"Well, we must help our chances, and I am determined not to wait here for death to come."

"You see very well, sir, that I think as you do, for I have not stopped."

"But where shall we get to?"

"To the shore, if we have a little good luck!"

"Well, we shall be certain that we are in the right direction if we don't meet the sea; and if it comes on us without us expecting it, we need only turn our backs to it."

The coastguard could not restrain an exclamation that sounded like a groan. "Then it will be too late," he said, "the equinoctial tide runs along the sand as quickly as a galloping horse."

"Bah! only a moment ago the water was so calm."

"Listen," exclaimed Sartilly, suddenly stopping, and then the distant but distinct sound of a bell fell upon the ears of the three wanderers.

"It is the bell of Mont Saint Michel; we are saved!"

"Ah! ah!" remarked the captain; "so they ring here to point out the way, as they do at the Monastery of Mont Saint Bernard? Well, we will walk towards the bell, as if we were marching to the cannon's mouth."

"No, for we should not reach the Mont," replied the coastguard; "the sea will be there before us, if it is not there already: but now that I know where the shore lies, we have only to go forward and turn a little to the right."

"Ah, I knew we could get out of this difficulty."

"I hope so; but do not let us lose any time."

They started on again with a quicker step, each one having a weight of anxiety. Sartilly, thinking of Jeanne, forgot almost the loss of her fortune. As for the captain, his conversation, full of jokes and gaiety, never flagged; but the coastguard striding rapidly along did not seem entirely reassured. His eyes were trying to pierce the fog, while his ears were listening to the sounds behind him, and more than once he halted for a few seconds, standing with his neck extended and with his hand raised in the attitude of a man trying to account for a noise which as yet is not well defined. However, there came a moment when he stopped entirely—mute, motionless, and pale. From the foggy depths of the sands there arose a strange murmur, a rolling sound resembling the distant roar of a cataract, which continued to approach rapidly—the west wind blowing by in damp gusts, while large sea-birds flew past at all possible swiftness, as if impelled by an invisible force. "It is the sea!" cried the coastguard; "nothing but our legs can save us now," and he rushed along the strand followed by the two friends.

It was time they hastened, as already a large though not a deep sheet

of water preceding the tide was flowing behind them; and this waveless water spread over the level sand like an immense carpet.

At first the fugitives gained ground. The fog had cleared away a little ahead of them, and a vague line of low ground could be seen.

The incline of the sands, moreover, fast became more apparent, and it was evident they were above the level of the tide, which they heard distinctly roaring a hundred paces behind them. Suddenly, however, the coastguard stopped, as if struck by a cannon-ball.

"Go on! go on!" cried Châteaubrun, trying to excite him with a frantic gesture.

"Look!" replied the coastguard. Before them whirled an arm of the sea. Sartilly darted to the right, the captain to the left, but both to the right and left there was the grey, deep water. They had fallen into one of the snares of the treacherous beach, where the soil being uneven the sea fills the hollows first of all, while the higher part still emerges for a few minutes before being covered by the tide. Their evil star had led them on to one of the narrow necks of sand, which would quickly disappear under the flood-tide now rolling towards them like an avalanche.

"We are hemmed in," said the coastguard, "and are bound to die."

"Die?" repeated the captain; "can a man die in this way, when he has served in the 7th Hussars?"

"Gentlemen," interrupted the coastguard, "we have but one chance, and that is, to let ourselves be carried away by the tide; if it should throw us upon the shore, perhaps we may be able to catch hold of something, providing we are not drowned before we get there."

The viscount pressed Châteaubrun's hand, murmuring, "If I die, and you survive me, you will watch over Jeanne?"

"You can trust her to me, my dear friend; but you won't die; it is quite enough that Noreff should have died in the mud."

The captain was still speaking, when the sea fell upon them, taking them off their feet, and carrying them along amid whirling foam. At last, however, a second shock suddenly brought back the instinct of self-preservation, and impelled them to catch hold of the first object that their hands came in contact with. The captain seized hold of the root of a tamarisk-tree, while Sartilly twined his arms round a large stone, and, on opening their eyes, they saw they had touched the shore. "Hold on! we are saved!" said the coastguard, who was alongside of them.

"A thousand thunders! what is that? A beam has fallen on my head," gasped the captain, who had just been struck by some large object.

"Ah, sir, it is the coffer!" said the coastguard; "here it is! I have it!"

It was true; the coffer, abandoned by Toby, had been carried away by the flood, and cast upon the shore! Providence orders all things well. The sand had swallowed up Jeanne's implacable enemy, and the equinoctial tide had brought back the fortune of the Mensignacs.

## XVI.

### THE PHANTOM.

It was night, three days after the terrible scenes on the sands of Tomlelaine. At the further end of a room faintly lighted, in a bed with white curtains—a young girl's bed—Jeanne de Mensignac was lying in

agitated slumber. Disconnected words came from her discoloured lips, and her arms were stretched out as if to repulse an invisible enemy. Fever was burning in the blue veins of her pale forehead, and a large brown circle surrounded her beautiful closed eyes. At her bedside sat a woman, looking at her sadly, and watching all her motions with attentive solicitude. At last the striking of an old buhl clock awakened the sick girl. "Julia!" she called, in a feeble voice.

"Here I am, mademoiselle," answered the maid, eagerly. "Are you better! Has your sleep done you good."

"I am thirsty," replied the young girl, eagerly swallowing the drink that her maid handed to her. For a moment she seemed relieved and then she added:

"I still feel the heat in my throat and breast."

"To-morrow you will be better; the doctor said so."

"To-morrow! Yes, perhaps to-morrow I shall not suffer any more."

"Ah! poor Edmond!" murmured the young girl, "I don't want him to see me in this state. I hope it will all be over before he comes back."

"Monsieur de Sartilly cannot be much longer away."

"It is now six days since he left, and I expected him yesterday; if he does not return to-morrow, you must send for the notary."

"But, my dear mistress, the doctor has ordered absolute rest and quiet."

"I must see him!" retorted Jeanne de Mensignac. Then after a long silence, she again began speaking in an affectionate voice. "Julia, you require rest. I feel better, and am going to sleep; you mustn't watch to-night. Call Miss Georgina."

"Miss Georgina isn't well this evening," said Julia, hesitatingly. "If you have a quiet night, I can sleep very well on the sofa in the next room."

The sick girl only answered with a gesture, and closed her eyes as if going to sleep again. Julia then went into the next room, sat down before the chimney-place, where a bright fire was blazing, a half-raised curtain separating the bed-room from this apartment, which was lighted only by the faint glimmer of one lamp. The maid looked around her uneasily, shuddering at times when her eyes fell upon the wainscoting before her,—as if she dreaded some unknown danger. Immobility is one of the surest signs of fear, and Julia, since she had been alone, seemed changed into a statue. An hour passed without her daring to move, when suddenly the noise of footsteps made her start. The sound came from the gallery hard by, and low voices could also be heard. The maid at once turned very pale, rose up, and listened. "Mademoiselle de Mensignac is asleep probably," said a footman; "but some one is watching in the next room, and if you will go in, sir——"

"Monsieur de Sartilly!" exclaimed Julia; "ah! we are saved!" and she darted towards the door, which was opened noiselessly.

It was indeed Edmond de Sartilly who appeared at the moment when the girl whose life depended upon his return despaired of ever seeing him again. "Where is she?" asked he.

"She is sleeping," answered Julia, pointing to her room.

"What does the doctor say?"

"Nothing encouraging. On the day after you left she was very well, but on the next night she became ill again, and has been suffering since. Ah! sir; her illness is a strange one. I have never seen one like it. She has shivering fits, accompanied by great thirst—an inward heat that parches her throat."

"I fear you have forgotten your promise never to leave her?"

"I swear to you, sir, I have never left her alone for an hour or a minute. Miss Georgina comes and sits by the bedside during the day, and then I don't leave the room; at night I lie down on the sofa here."

"But while you are asleep some one might come."

"I don't sleep. I am too much afraid."

"Afraid? you are afraid? Of what are you afraid? What have you seen? Answer, speak quickly."

"It was on the first night that I had been sitting up with my mistress," replied the maid. "I was not sleepy, although I felt very fatigued. I heard the clock strike twelve, and had just got up to go into my mistress's room, to see if she needed anything, when, at the moment I turned to that side of the room, the fire blazed up quite suddenly, and then, why, I saw in the middle of one of the flowers of the tapestry, as the light of the fire fell straight on the wainscoting—I saw an eye shining."

The viscount turned pale, and could not help looking at the wall.

"Yes, I am quite sure of it," continued the maid, in a very low voice.

"And then, oh! then, I thought I should die with fright, and I laid down upon a sofa pretending to sleep. I do not know how long a time I remained there, but ever since then—every night always at the same hour—I have again seen——"

Julia stopped, hiding her face with her hands. "Has this girl been dreaming?" thought Sartilly, looking attentively at the maid, who did not dare to move. Then, taking a sudden resolution, he said aloud: "I will watch to-night in Mademoiselle de Mensignac's room."

And, without waiting for the girl's reply, he raised the curtain and went into his sweetheart's room. Jeanne was sleeping, breathing hurriedly, and involuntary starts at intervals contracted her features.

Sartilly stopped at the bedside, holding his breath and trying to suppress even the beating of his heart. He was terribly distressed, for Noreff's last cry still sounded in his ear: "She will die!" Yes, thus had the scoundrel spoken while disappearing in his sandy tomb, and it seemed as if the sinister prediction were about to be accomplished. "Who is killing her?" muttered Sartilly, looking around him. The uncertain light of a night-lamp alone glimmered through the chamber. "I must know!" he added, in a low voice, and he hid himself behind a large curtain that hung before the window.

From the post he had taken he could see a low door opposite him, half hid by heavy drapery. He had a vague remembrance that this door opened into the corridor leading to the library; and while he was reflecting on the subject the portal was opened noiselessly, and on the threshold he saw a woman, approaching with the silent step of a phantom, and enveloped from head to foot in a long scarlet mantle, while a thick lace veil, like a Spanish mantilla, hid her features completely. In her white hand, which projected outside her mantle, she held an object that Sartilly could not distinguish. She advanced slowly, seeming to glide rather than walk over the carpet; once or twice, moreover, she stopped as if to listen, and then walked straight up to the bed, which she almost touched.

Sartilly held his breath. "If she were to stab Jeanne!" he thought; but no, with her hand stretched above a cup placed within reach of the poor girl, the woman dropped some white powder into it. Edmond knew all now. Jeanne was being poisoned every night!

The woman in the scarlet mantle stood motionless for an instant, turning her head as if to make sure that she was alone in the room. Her eyes gleamed brightly behind her veil. Finally, however, she slowly retreated to the door, lifted the curtain, and disappeared.

"At last!" murmured Sartilly, emerging from his hiding place, and crossing the room swiftly and noiselessly. The door could be opened softly. The gallery was dark; there was no moon, and the pale light of the stars barely sufficed to guide Sartilly. However, the woman with the mantle seemed to know the way perfectly well. But how had she entered the house? By which way was she going out? This was what Edmond wanted to know. "This very night Noreff's accomplice must disclose her secret to me," he said to himself, "and I must follow her to the end."

A vague presentiment had already warned him that the strange woman would go towards the library, and he remembered what he had seen there, while looking for volume seven of the History of Normandy.

He now regulated his walk by the woman's, the thick carpet deadening the noise of his steps; and the critical moment was fast approaching. The woman in red was about to enter the library, and it was necessary to be near enough to prevent her from shutting herself inside it. So Sartilly hastened on. A wide high window lighted the corridor opposite the massive door which the phantom was going to open, and the contrast between the light and the shadow made it difficult to advance without being seen; so he stopped at the limit of the point where the darkness ceased, and waited.

The woman, after a few seconds' hesitation, placed her hand on the key and turned it in the lock, and then, just as the heavy door was moving on its hinges, Sartilly rushed towards her. He indeed managed to seize hold of her for an instant, but she disengaged herself by a violent effort and darted into the library. Sartilly pushed back the door as she was trying to shut it behind her and went in. When his hand touched her shoulder, she did not move.

"Who are you, and what do you want with me?" she asked.

"Who am I?" replied Sartilly, trembling with rage. "I am the affianced lover of the woman you have just poisoned! My wish is to avenge her, as well as her brother, whom your accomplices murdered."

A burst of laughter was the woman's only answer.

"Ah! you acknowledge it then!" cried the viscount.

"I acknowledge it? Yes, I confess that I pursue that infamous race to extermination! Jeanne will die, as Roger did, like all who bear the name of Massignac! I also wish for my revenge."

"You do not seem to know that I mean to kill you!" said Sartilly.

"What does that matter? My work is done."

"No, I will not kill you, but hand you over to the officers of the law."

"Hand me over to the officers of the law? Then you wish to dishonour the one you love?"

Edmond tried to cry out, but his voice failed him; he wanted to drag the poisoner away, but his hands opened in spite of himself. "Come!" said she, drawing him towards a window. "I want you to know me. You see very well that I do not fear you," and then she raised her veil.

"The woman with the golden hair!" said Sartilly, starting back.

"Listen to me," said the poisoner; "you can give me up afterwards. You have already seen me once, when you came with the police bloodhounds to my house; and you will know where to find them to help you

to arrest me, for alone you will not dare to attempt it ! There is one man of the gang, however, you will never find again, the one whom you made a friend of, the one who watched Noreff's house when I drove you from it. If you want to find him again, you must look for him in the Seine."

"Jottrat !"

"Yes, Jottrat, your worthy accomplice. You recognise me, don't you ? And now I will tell you the cause of my revenge. I have revenged myself because the brother of your betrothed murdered my sister, whom he had basely dishonoured !"

"Roger a murderer ? That is false !"

"False ? You dare to tell me that it is false, when you know perfectly well that it was here—here in this gallery—that the miserable wretch cut her throat ? You know that her head fell here ; you have seen the stains of blood ! Come to the spot where my sister's blood has left its mark, and when we are there, send for the valets of the murderer and your friends of the police !" As the woman in red spoke the these last words, she sprang towards the end of the library, and was lost in the darkness.

Sartilly heard a door suddenly close, then a loud laugh, that seemed to come through the walls ; finally nothing more. He ran, he sought, he called through the darkness, but only the echoes from the vaulted ceiling answered him. The poisoner had disappeared ! He stood aghast with surprise and fright, not even trying to discover the mysterious passage by which the horrible creature had escaped.

"Save Jeanne !" that was the first thought that arose in his brain. The poisoner had disappeared, but the poison was still there, and from one minute to another the young girl might awake and drink the contents of the cup into which death had just been poured.

Edmond darted into the corridor and reached the door of the bed-room, which he opened with inexpressible emotion. The night-lamp lighted the white curtains and the fatal cup, with its uncertain glimmer. Jeanne still slept, and the regular sound of her breathing announced that she had not awoke. Sartilly, nearly fainting with delight, walked towards the bed with tottering steps ; when he seized hold of the cup of poison, his hand trembled so much that the noise of the moving china disturbed the poor girl, who moved, stretched out her arms, and murmured some disconnected words : "Edmond !" she repeated, "I want to see him again——"

The viscount was about to reply to Jeanne's appeal, when he saw Julia at the door of the boudoir, making a sign to him not to speak. He then thought that surprise and joy might have a disastrous effect upon the invalid, and determined to leave the room.

"I saw the eye !" said Julia ; "it was there when you left me alone ; it looked at me as it did last night, and every other night. Oh ! I shall die of fright if I have to watch again !"

"You shall never watch again," said Sartilly to her, "for to-morrow the poisoner will be given up to the officers of justice."

"The poisoner ?"

"Yes, that infamous English-woman, who watched you in this boudoir while her accomplice came to Jeanne's bedside and poured out the poison !"

"But, sir, Miss Georgina was never alone in my mistress's room."

"No, there was no need for her to go there. The woman in red took the poison into Jeanne's room."

"The woman in red !" Those are the words my mistress so often repeated in her delirium."

"Yes, the woman who crawled in like a serpent when the other let her know that the hour had come. You watched, poor, devoted girl; but they spied upon you at every moment."

"Ah! so it was to spy upon me that the English-woman left me alone. I remember now that she always had a pretext for retiring early."

"To-morrow I will finish with that inhuman creature; but she must not leave the house to-night. Where is her room?"

"Above my mistress's. She must be there, for I just heard her walking about; and besides, for the last half-hour," said Julia, hesitatingly, "the eye has disappeared."

"Yes, she ceased watching you because the work was accomplished. The poison is there, in that cup, and now I want you to do two things for me. First of all, just lock that cup up in a cupboard, and keep the key of it. Afterwards wake up one of the footmen, and tell him to come here; I must put a sentinel at Miss Georgina's door."

"I think old Chavert, the porter, would do better; he does not like the English-woman, but the two footmen are devoted to her."

"Go and tell the porter, then, and be quick," added Sartilly.

"There has been too much delay," he thought, after the maid had gone off. "I have hesitated too much with secondary fears. What do I care about the old intrigues of Noreff and General de Mensignac? They shall not kill Jeanne, and I will give up the murderers, even if the law touches Roger's name. Give up the murderers?" he said, striking his forehead. "But how? When I have denounced this miserable English-woman she will refuse to speak. How shall I find her accomplices? Ah, they did right to kill Jottrat; he would have known how to find them."

A noise of footsteps and talking coming from the corridor, at this moment, attracted his attention. A door of the boudoir communicated with the gallery, and Edmond went out to prevent Jeanne being awakened by this noise which he could not explain. At the door he met the porter and maid. "Sir," said the porter, "there is a man here who has declared to me that he has matters of the greatest importance to tell you; he went three times yesterday to the Rue d'Astorg, he says, and as soon as he knew you were here——"

"Where is he?"

"In the library, waiting."

"I will go there; and now, Chavert, listen to me attentively. You are an old servant, in whom I have entire confidence; fearful things are going on here, and you must help me."

"I would do anything in the world for Mademoiselle Jeanne, sir."

"Well, you must go to the second floor and keep watch at Miss Georgina's door until I call you; you must not let her leave her room."

"Oh, you can depend upon me, sir, for I detest her."

"You, Julia, must not leave your mistress's room," continued Sartilly; "besides, it is probable that I shall soon have done with this man. Who can he be?" he murmured, while going slowly to the library. What new surprise awaited him there? On his way he had time to exhaust all his suppositions, without falling upon the right one. On opening the door, he saw that the porter had very properly left a lamp upon one of the tables; and in the luminous circle described amid the dark shadows projecting from the high oaken bookcases, a man was standing motionless. Sartilly at once asked: "Who are you, and what have you come here for?"

"It is I, sir!" softly replied the man.

"Jottrat!" cried Sartilly. "What! is it you!—you whom I thought dead—murdered by those scoundrels!"

"No, sir, they did not succeed in killing me, although they tried to do so, I assure you. I was saved by a miracle. But now it is not of myself that I want to speak. Mademoiselle de Mensignac is in great danger, and as soon as I heard of your return from Normandy I ran to your house."

"My return from Normandy! You knew then that I had gone there?"

"I know everything, sir. I know that you were near perishing, and that you have brought back Mademoiselle de Mensignac's fortune. I know also that Providence has provided a part of our vengeance, and that Noreff is dead in the sands of Tombelaine. Still there is one thing I do not know. I do not know whether I have arrived in time to stop the infamous work that has been going on in this house for the past three months. I was told too late, and, besides, I could not act without you."

"Yes, it is still time," cried Sartilly; "yes, for I have surprised the prisoner, and taken away the poison. Jeanne will live."

"As for the wretches who tried to kill her," rejoined Jottrat; "their punishment is my concern; at this moment I have but an order to give for all the culprits to fall into the hands of the law."

"All! That is impossible, for the terrible woman who brought death here each night has just escaped from this room where we now are, after telling me her name, showing me her face, and threatening to dishonour all the Mensignacs. In fact," added Sartilly, lowering his voice, "I fear she possesses terrible secrets!"

If the viscount, while speaking, had looked at the detective, he would have read Roger's justification in his eyes. "The woman whom you speak about, sir," said Jottrat, "bears the name of the scoundrel whom you saw die, and she has taken part in his crimes; but among all the secrets she possesses not one affects the honour of the Mensignacs."

"Oh! I am anxious and willing to believe you, and I could curse myself for having let her escape."

"Well, sir, I have already had the honour of telling you that it is my business to punish the culprits. The woman in the red mantle has been able to vanish away like a phantom, but phantoms who pour out poison don't long remain invisible and I know where to seize this one."

"God is just!" murmured Sartilly.

"Yes, yes," resumed the detective. "However, we must arrest them all, and I came here for the accomplice of the prisoner."

"The English-woman? She is now a prisoner in her room."

"Excuse me, sir; I am forgetting that I came here to fulfil a duty and keep an oath. I hope that by to-morrow, at this hour, I shall have fulfilled my task and be released from my promise. Now pray have confidence in me, and let me speak to Miss Georgina Fassitt alone."

"What! here?"

"Yes, here; and I promise you that I will prevent her passing through the wall; I know words to break the charms that protect phantoms."

"I believe you, and besides, if I am not present at the interview, I shall not be far from the library. If you need me, you have only to call."

"Our conversation will be short, but it is important not to defer it."

"I'll go and fetch Miss Georgina," replied Sartilly.

When the viscount had left, Jottrat began walking rapidly up and down the room. This man, who had just authoritatively announced the approaching punishment of Noreff's accomplices, was now making des-



pairing gestures and uttering disconnected words. "My son ! my child ! I shall never find you," he repeated in a hollow voice. "What have they done with you ?—the miserable scoundrels."

A slight noise made him turn his head ; a woman had just come in. He instinctively drew near the lamp, as if, while questioning the English-woman, he wished to have the full light thrown upon her. She also seemed to seek the light, for she walked straight towards this man who could be only an enemy, and standing before him, with her hand resting on the table, she asked : "What motive have you for calling me here ?"

Miss Georgina's voice made Jottrat start, as if he had been struck by an electric shock, and, taking a step forward, he approached almost near enough to touch the English-woman's face. "Susan !" he cried.

The English-woman started back as if she had trod upon a serpent ; her eyes, shining in the darkness, were fixed upon the face of the detective with penetrating force. She did not recognise him. "I have found you at last !" muttered Jottrat.

"Cease this jesting," replied Miss Georgina. "I never saw you before."

"I will revive your recollections," said Jottrat, bitterly ; "we parted at Havre on the 24th of May, 1830 !"

This simple sentence produced a prodigious effect upon the English-woman, who turning round like a wounded lioness, hastened up to Jottrat, staring in his face. "Louis !" she murmured, in a voice so low that it could be scarcely heard,— "the dead come back again, then !"

"I can understand that, as seventeen years have passed, you have forgotten me ; but I recognise you : your crimes have not changed you !"

"I recognise you also. You are Louis Jottrat, that I formerly had the misfortune to marry ! What do you want with me ?"

There was a moment's silence. On seeing this wretched woman again, this woman whom he had formerly loved so much, Jottrat had tried to fortify himself against the remembrance of a scarcely extinct passion. However, her monstrous impudence restored all his confidence and energy.

"What do I want ?" he replied, in a voice that no longer trembled. "I will tell you. I have come here to arrest the accomplice of a poisoner. I knew that in this house there was an infamous creature charged with ensuring the success of a plot laid by certain people."

The English-woman's face had been like marble so far, but, at the name of poisoner, she could not hide a nervous start. "I knew that," continued Jottrat, coldly ; "but I did not know that the woman who was in the pay of a scoundrel, was the same person who formerly sold her honour !"

A disdainful smile curved Georgina's lips.

"Her honour and her son !" continued the detective, looking at her.

"My son !" repeated the English woman ; "you do right not to call him *our* son, for Henry only knew his mother."

"Then you confess that you stole my child from me, and you refuse to give him back to me."

"I confess, and I refuse."

"Then you must die !"

"Kill me ! I am ready. Henry will avenge me."

At this beloved name Jottrat's anger suddenly subsided, and big tears rolled down his cheeks. "Susan," murmured he, "give me back my son, and I will forgive you all the evil you have done me."

"What do I care for your pardon ?" she said, contemptuously.

"Give him back to me, and I will save you from the scaffold."

"The scaffold ! Who are you to talk of sending me there ?"

"You wish to know ? I am an agent of the detective police, and have only to say a word for your head to fall upon the scaffold."

This time the blow went home. Susan became livid ; still it was in a sneering tone that she asked : "Do you seriously ask me to give Henry back to you ? The calling of spy which you have chosen may be a lucrative one, but it does not tempt me for my son ; and I doubt very much if he would care to see a father who has fallen so low !"

"I swear to you," said Jottrat, coldly, "that if in a quarter of an hour you do not do what I have asked you, you will be arrested."

"To arrest me you must have proofs, and I defy you to find any."

"You shall see whether I have proofs or not. The man named Noreff bought you at Havre, and when you sold yourself to him you dreamt of riches, luxury, and an opulent life in large cities ; he, when buying you, wanted you as an accomplice and slave. The bargain was faithfully kept on both sides."

"I don't understand you," said Susan, somewhat anxiously.

"You will understand. This man had a friend, or rather a companion of his pleasures, named General de Mensignac. It was a time for conspiracies. The general conspired against the government, and Noreff, a Russian spy, drew Mensignac into a disastrous enterprise, that nearly compromised the entire Legitimist party. Noreff obtained from the general a list of the conspirators, and then gave it to the police !"

"Excuse me," interrupted Susan, tauntingly ; "your historical recollections may be full of interest, but I don't know what connection they have with us."

"I will tell you," continued Jottrat, unmoved. "From the day when Noreff possessed the secret of the plot, he became master of the general's fortune and honour ; he succeeded in persuading him that the police would make him appear a traitor in the eyes of his party, and that he must pay enormous sums for his silence. Noreff had indeed sworn to appropriate by degrees all the wealth of the Mensignac family."

"Really !" stammered Susan, trying to smile.

"He had brought one of his accomplices, named Ludmila Ludloff, with him from Riga, where, although she was a serf, he passed her off as his wife. Being very beautiful, she was charged by him with the task of ruining the old general ; and on the night the latter expired she went alone to him, implacable and cold, to wring from him engagements which compromised the fortune of the family !"

"And you hope to make me believe this absurd story ?"

"Another accomplice played a longer and more infamous part, as Noreff, growing tired of the unfortunate creature he had bought at Havre, and wishing to have a spy in the Mensignac family, introduced her here as Georgina Fassitt, and for seventeen years she has been betraying her benefactor so that she might have her share of the spoils !"

"Betraying is a vague word," said Susan, disdainfully.

"I have not finished, and am going to tell you how your treachery will lead you to the scaffold ! Noreff worked upon the son, as he had done upon the father, and when he thought the son's ruin was complete, he wanted to take his life as well as that of his sister. He first began by Roger. Ludmila Ludloff had a sister ten years younger than herself, and still more beautiful, but who resembled her to a strange degree. Her name was Vanda. Noreff ordered her to lead Roger astray. She obeyed,

but was imprudent enough to love him sincerely, and then Noreff condemned them both to death. The sentence was executed here by Toby, Monsieur de Sartilly's servant, whom you brought into the library!"

"It is not true! He came alone."

"You see very well that you knew of the crime and have just denounced yourself."

"No—no!"

"Do you wish me to show you the stains that Vanda's blood left upon the carpet? Do you wish me to open the iron door with which Toby cut off the head which Noreff's major-domo was carrying to Saint Cloud in a basket? Do you want me to take you to the catacombs where Roger has been buried alive,—or to show you the way by which the poisoner, your accomplice, comes every night?"

"It is not true! it is not true! To prove my guilt, the persons you call my accomplices must be arrested, and you cannot find them."

"Two only are living. Noreff is dead, and his major-domo was killed on the night when, thanks to your help, he was carrying off Jeanne de Mensignac. Ludmila Ludloff and Toby, the poisoner and the headsman, are at this moment at the house on the Quai de Billy, where you will join them to-night." Susan tried to speak, but the words died away on her lips. "That retreat is surrounded," resumed Jottrat, "and I swear to you they shall not escape. Noreff took me there to murder me, and I know all its outlets; to-morrow your accomplices will be arrested, and their punishment will be prompt and terrible. It depends on me, and on me alone, to send you to the galleys or the scaffold. Will you give me back my son?"

An infernal smile curved Susan's pallid lips. "Your son?" she said, in a harsh voice; "you want to know him?"

"Tell me where he is, and I swear that I will save you."

"Well, he is at the house on the Quai de Billy, and will be arrested to-night, for his name is Toby! And he murdered Vanda!"

It was now Jottrat's turn to exclaim: "It is not true!"

"You say it is not true," retorted Susan. "Will you go with me to the house on the quay to see whether Toby will recognise me as his mother?"

Jottrat's limbs trembled, and he lacked the strength to answer. Evidently enough the English-woman had told the truth, and with that rapidity of intuition that springs up in extreme cases, Jottrat had already summed up the dates, and acquired a moral certainty of his misfortune. "Ah!" he murmured, "see what you have made of my son—of our son, for he is yours also—this child whom you have delivered up to the monsters who have ruined him! You have not even known how to be a mother."

"You would, no doubt, have preferred it if he had followed the same honourable career as you have chosen."

"He was too young to think of the future," said Jottrat, without replying to her sarcasm; "but you have taught him to be a criminal."

"I don't repent of what I have done; in fact I would do it again."

"You unhappy woman!"

"Well! what are you waiting for? My son is already, no doubt, in the hands of the spies under your command. So have the mother arrested."

The guilty woman who had become so pale a few minutes before on seeing herself unmasked, had now raised her head, and spoke words of defiance; and Jottrat, understanding the calculations of her deliberate daring, said to himself: "She thinks I will not do it."

He was right: Susan, feeling herself lost, was playing her last card.

Jottrat could not denounce her without sending his son Henry to the scaffold with her, and the horrible woman judged rightly that the life of her son might redeem her own.

A fearful struggle was going on in the father's heart, and the English-woman watched the effect of the perfidious words she had just spoken. Suddenly, however, Jottrat's contracted features relaxed, as by a prodigious effort of will he overcame his emotion, and then, in that cold tone that indicates a determined resolution, he slowly said :

"You are deceived if you hope to intimidate me. No one can save you now—not even your accomplices, for the child you have made a murderer is no longer mine !"

Susan closed her eyes, as if she had been struck by death. If she had looked at Jottrat, she would have read on his face that his lips alone denied Henry, and that paternal love had already suggested to him a means of saving his child.

"All is now finished between us !" resumed the detective, affecting a calmness which quite deceived his wife ; "you are a prisoner in this house, and there will be a guard over you until to-morrow morning, when you will be taken to prison. You have all the night to repent of your crime."

Furious and despairing, Susan again attempted to struggle against the evidence. "Proofs ! you have no proofs !" she cried. "Where is the poison you accuse me of having allowed somebody to give to Jeanne ?"

"We will see," coldly said Jottrat, opening the library door, but without losing sight of the culprit. There was no need of calling. Sartilly was in the passage, quite ready to interfere if the English-woman attempted to escape as her accomplice had done. "Please, sir," said Jottrat, assuming his official manner, "the examination I have just concluded leaves no doubt as to this woman's participation in the crimes committed in this house, and she must be properly guarded."

"I will give the order myself, and see also that it is rigorously executed," answered Sartilly, looking at Susan.

"Permit me to ask you, sir," resumed the detective, "if you took the precaution to preserve the cup into which the poison was thrown ?"

"I gave it to Julia, and you will find it untouched."

"It will be the more important to produce it as it must contain an enormous quantity. My information is accurate, and I know that it was intended to kill Mademoiselle de Mensignac at one blow to-night."

"Let us finish with this," interrupted the English-woman ; "you don't intend to force me to listen any longer to the absurd accusations from which I disdain to justify myself."

Sartilly rang, and on the porter coming up immediately Susan understood that any attempt at escape would be useless.

"I am obliged," said Jottrat, "to examine the room in which this woman is to be shut up. My responsibility is already heavily engaged elsewhere, and I must make sure of all my prisoners."

"You hope, then, to arrest Madame de Noreff and Toby to-night ?" asked Sartilly, lowering his voice.

"I have no reason not to speak before this woman, as she won't see her accomplices until she meets them at the court of assizes. The poisoner has just at this moment taken refuge with Toby in a house where Monsieur de Noreff planned his criminal operations. It was there that he secreted volume seven of your History of Normandy, and it was there I

nearly lost my life. There is no one missing—not even the pretended naval officer who picked Toby up in the Bay of Mont Saint Michel.”

“As he speaks of his plans so openly,” thought the English-woman, “he intends to execute them; I have nothing more to hope. Before going to my room,” she said aloud, “I have some orders to give to Julia. I suppose you will not prevent my speaking to her?”

“You can see her, but not alone.”

“Julia must be in the boudoir,” said Sartilly, “and on the way to Miss Georgina’s room we can stop a moment there.”

“Come, gentlemen,” said the English-woman, whose eyes shone with extraordinary brilliancy. And then with a firm step she went out of the library and along the corridor, the porter and Sartilly going on ahead, while Jottrat followed, so that she realised there was no chance of escaping. They reached the door of the boudoir; the lamp was still burning, and Julia was walking backward and forward, trembling with anxiety and agitation. Sartilly was going to call her, when the English-woman, pushing past him, went into the room. On seeing her appear with haggard eyes and an agitated face, Julia started back, taking refuge in a corner of the room. Jottrat darted after his wife, for he realised that something terrible was about to happen; but, before he had time to prevent her doing so, she bounded towards the *pic-table*, where the eup containing the poison still stood, the maid having neglected to lock it up.

“You will not arrest me to-morrow,” hissed Susan, “for to-morrow I shall be dead!”—and then she swallowed the poison at a draught.

## XVII.

### THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE.

ON the hilly ground which overlooks the Quai de Billy, there was at that period a narrow and crooked ascent, which bore the name of the Rue Bizet. The immense works which have so greatly modified this part of Paris have now-a-days left but a fragment of the street, almost inaccessible to vehicles, and one can scarcely realise the curious situation of the few secluded houses that formerly stood there. The finest, or rather the largest, of these houses—for it seemed very badly kept—scarcely showed its front through the bushy trees. No one had ever been seen going into the place but a gardener, paid by the year to take care of the lawns and rake the walks—two things which he did very badly. This man knew nothing of the owners of the places, merely going for his wages to a notary in the neighbourhood, whom the landlord had commissioned to pay him. This neglect had lasted so long that no one in the neighbourhood suspected a mystery. The oldest inhabitants vaguely remembered having formerly heard of some conspirators whom the police had surprised there; but it was an old story, almost forgotten in 1847, and the passers-by did not even glance at the place.

Nevertheless, at daybreak, a few hours after the tragical demise of Susan Jottrat, *alias* Georgina Fassitt, a man might have been seen walking past the rusty railing that skirted the Rue de Chaillot. He was seemingly agitated by violent and conflicting feelings; at times he started off with rapid strides, as if decided to leave the place, and then returning to the

gate again, he looked at the house with glowing eyes. This early pedestrian was none other than Jottrat. After the painful and overwhelming revelations of Susan, he had suffered cruel perplexity, as, before knowing the secret of Toby's birth, he had organised a stringent watch around this house where Noreff's accomplices were hiding; the precautions taken being of such a kind that it would be impossible for them to escape. Now, however, he reproached himself bitterly for having been so skilful, and wished to undo his work as ardently as he formerly wished to accomplish it; for, in his fatherly heart, horror had given place to affectionate indulgence for a misguided son. To save Henry, tear him from his accomplices and impending punishment, to escape with him to some distant country, was henceforth his only aim.

Indifferent to all the interests that had actuated him for the last month; indifferent even to the providential vengeance that had already struck Susan and Noreff, Jottrat, with his paternal love stimulating all his faculties and energy, had conceived a plan which he wished put into execution.

For two reasons, since his adventure in the dungeon-room on the margin of the Seine, Jottrat had not given any signs of life to the police authorities—the first was due to events which had followed upon the miraculous preservation of his life, and the other was connected with his employment. He did not wish to appear before his superiors until he could give up to them at the same time all the perpetrators of the mysterious murder known as the affair of the Bois de Boulogne. He secured, to assist him in his expedition, some men who were no longer officially employed by the administration, and remunerated them liberally. These men were devoted to him, and had full confidence in his judgment. So he based his new plan upon the fortunate circumstance that enabled him to act without rendering any account of his conduct; and indeed nothing prevented him from entering the garden alone and leaving it again with his son, giving his subalterns some pretext for doing so, and never re-appearing. The difficulty was not there, although he needed great courage to risk going alone to this house; but, when once there, could he persuade Toby to leave his accomplices and accompany a man he must necessarily distrust? He, Jottrat, could not make himself known to his son in presence of Noreff's widow without compromising everything. So it was necessary to find an expedient suited to the occasion, and Jottrat was trying to think of one during his agitated walk along the Rue de Chaillot. Suddenly he seemed to have found what he wanted, for he passed his hand through the bars, and pressing upon a spring, opened the gate and went in.

The day was dawning, but some stars still shone in the sky, and the uncertain glimmer of morn fell dimly on the great, gaunt trees in front of the silent house. Jottrat proceeded along a wide walk, bordered by cypresses, all the details of his kidnapping by Noreff coming back to his mind. He perfectly recognised the place where they had forced him to alight from the carriage, and where they had tied his hands and bandaged his eyes; but from the gate to the house the distance was too short to coincide with the length of the journey he had made in the darkness. He must have been carried that night to the extreme end of the garden, and there must be a building there that led to the subterranean room.

When Jottrat arrived in front of the house he walked around it, and soon saw that he had not been mistaken, as the garden extended to the end of the declivity; at the furthest end, and at rather a long distance there was a building of mean aspect. *There*, no doubt, was the entrance. the

subterranean vaults, which probably extended under the quay, as the room where he had been imprisoned faced the Seine.

However, for the moment the most difficult thing to divine was where the guilty ones had hidden. Were they in the house which his spies had seen them enter, or had they sought refuge in the safer subterranean retreat? Jottrat thought that the only means of assuring himself of this was to boldly approach the door of the house, and afterwards, if necessary, proceed to the vaults. He flattered himself that Ludmila and Toby would not recognise him. And as for the pretended naval officer, who was simply one of Noreff's Russian acolytes, he was sure that he had never met him. He thus had some chance of introducing himself, under the pretext of bringing a message and, at the same time of drawing Toby aside, and persuading him to go with him.

Jottrat, giving a last glance at the house, went up the moss-covered steps, and, raised an enormous knocker. The rap he gave resounded for a long time, as if the noise had been lost in the deserted rooms of an empty building. He listened attentively, but no answer came from inside, although he thought for an instant that he heard a slight cracking sound overhead. However, on looking up, he saw nothing. And yet at the moment when he was about to take hold of the knocker to strike a second blow, a window-shutter was set ajar on the first floor, and the barrel of a gun passed through the opening.

Jottrat did not suspect the danger, but it seems there is a mysterious instinct that warns a man exposed to a violent and sudden death—the same magnetic influence that any one feels when gazed at by a person he does not see. Mechanically, he drew close against the door, the lintel of which half shielded him. It was time he did so, for the gun was fired, and the bullet that would have certainly killed him on the spot only reached his shoulder. Thrown down by the shock he experienced, Jottrat, while falling, raised his head and uttered a cry of grief, for behind the partially opened window-shutter he had just recognized Toby's face. "Paricide!" he gasped; "ah! there's nothing left for me but to die!"

The groom burst into a ferocious laugh as he looked at him. Placed there as an advanced sentinel by his accomplices, who had taken refuge in the vaults, and seeing Jottrat, whom he knew perfectly well, as he had met him at his master's house, he had thought that he would now be able to get rid of a spy with impunity.

Since Noreff's death, the band to which Toby belonged had no other desire than that of leaving France. Ludmila Ludloff had collected together all the gold and valuables amassed by her worthy associate, and was ready for an immediate flight, thinking her situation sufficiently dangerous to warrant the sacrifice of the five hundred thousand francs which Noreff had expected to wring from General de Mensignac's heir. However, before starting she had wished to complete her vengeance. To prevent Jeanne, poisoned by small doses, from surviving, this terrible woman had remained to finish her work, and this excess of infamy wrought her ruin.

The report of the gun had been heard by the watchers surrounding the garden; and Jottrat, lying on the steps, saw with despair two of his men coming through the open gateway, while a third climbed over a wall much further on. There was no longer any time to stop them; besides, the unhappy father lacked the strength to do so, having lost a large quantity of blood; his eyes closed, and he fainted away, wishing he might die.

As for Toby, after firing he had immediately thought of warning his

accomplices, so, going out of the house by a back door, he proceeded as fast as he could toward the entrance of the vaults. The man who was climbing the wall, seeing him, jumped into the garden, and called his comrades. The latter, as Jottrat was unconscious, thought that the most important matter was to arrest the fugitive, for having entire confidence in their chief they were convinced there was some important matter at stake, and indeed one of them said to his companion, who hesitated at leaving the wounded man: "I know our master; he would never forgive us if we were to stop to take care of him, instead of laying hold of these scoundrels"—and this reasoning deciding them, they then started off at full speed.

Toby had excellent legs, and would probably have escaped from the three men, had not a fourth agent suddenly appeared from the lower end of the garden, whence he had been drawn by the cries of his comrades. Although ignorant of what was the matter, he immediately manœuvred so as to stop the runaway, seizing hold of the door of the vaults at the very moment when Toby was trying to shut it behind him. A great struggle took place, and the groom, while resisting with all his strength, uttered energetic appeals which resounded through the vaulted building, and increased the ardour of Jottrat's other men who were running to help their comrade. They understood very well that the fugitive was calling to his accomplices; and one of them more collected than his companions whistled three times to warn some other men watching on the river.

This signal decided Toby to cease the struggle, for the door suddenly yielded to the four officers, who unhesitatingly entered a dark corridor, where they could no longer see the man they were pursuing. However, hearing his hurried steps they followed the sound until it suddenly ceased. Their situation was very disquieting, and determined as they were, they stopped short. "We had, perhaps, better return to our master for instructions," said one of them who had seen the detective fall.

"You know very well that he isn't in a state to give us any," answered a comrade, an old police blood-hound, who never voluntarily gave up the game. "The garden being watched from the lower end, the birds cannot fly that way; we have only to look here, and we shall find them."

Some steps led downward from the spot where the pursuers had stopped, and, while talking the agent lighted a dark lantern. "Let us go down," said he, firmly.

After descending some twenty steps, the little troop found themselves on a landing, which they carefully explored, the slabs upon which they walked resounding under their feet. "We are above a lower vault," said the man who had taken the command, and with the instinct which the habit of searching for criminals imparts he began to examine the slabs with his lantern in his hand, his motionless comrades looking at him attentively. Suddenly they saw him stoop, and lie down at full length upon the stones, placing his lantern beside him, and applying his eye to a narrow opening which he had just discovered.

The spectacle he beheld was a strange one. In a vaulted room, amid trunks, cases, and packages of every form and size, two men and a woman were talking with animation; while in a corner which was not so well lighted three barrels, uncovered, stood on one end against the wall. After looking, the agent wished to hear what these men and this woman were saying, and, applying his ear to the hole he distinctly heard their voices. "The boat is a long time coming," said the woman, impatiently.



"It will be here in twenty minutes," replied the elder of the men; "and in half an hour we can put these trunks on board and start."

"As for the fools who pursued me," said the second man, who was Toby, and who had just reloaded his gun, "before they have found their way into this room we shall be far off."

On hearing this, Jottrat's subordinate, thinking it time to interfere, called out: "The fools are here, and you will do as well to surrender!"

A howl of rage was heard from the end of the room. Toby turned his gun upwards, but the woman tore it from his hands, and, before her companion had time to prevent her, she applied the muzzle to the edge of one of the open barrels, the rays of the early morning sun which came through the window, lighting up her face, and bringing out the glow of her golden-coloured hair.

"Surrender!" cried a voice which came from the river side. The signal given from the garden had been heard, and some men watching in a boat had now arrived.

"I will die revenged!" replied the woman in red, touching the trigger of her firearm.

Then a frightful explosion shook the earth, and everything crumbled away amid a cloud of smoke.

## XVIII.

### EXPLANATIONS.

THREE days had elapsed since the catastrophe on the Quai de Billy. And in Paris this is a longer time than is necessary to forget any event, however strange it may be; besides, the cause of the catastrophe in question remained unknown. Some carbonised human remains had been found, but as no one had ever seen any inhabitants in the house in the Rue Bizet, it was believed there had been a chance explosion of an unknown powder dépôt; and there were even persons who explained the accident by affirming that this powder had been brought there by the Prussians, when they wished to blow up the bridge of Jena in 1815.

Of all the men who had taken part in this drama, not one survived to recount its details—not one, excepting Jottrat, who drawn from his fainting fit by the violent shock, succeeded in dragging himself out of the garden. However, Jottrat had serious reasons for keeping silent, and so that he might avoid all embarrassing questions, he had the presence of mind to go to Sartilly, who received him at his house, with open arms. It resulted, from the disappearance of all the culprits in this drama, that the police itself never had anything like a perfect knowledge of it. The suicide of Miss Georgina was supposed to have been caused by spleen, a well-known English malady; and, after a short inquest, nothing more was thought of the governess and her tragical demise. As for Monsieur de Noreff, he had ostensibly left his house in the Rue de Varennes to take a long journey through Russia, and the sands of Tombelaine told no tales. Thus, by a succession of providential events, three men alone possessed the terrible secret of so many catastrophes.

On a bright and joyous spring morning these three men were sitting in a little room in the Rue d'Astorg, talking together of the past and the future.

Captain de Châteaubrun, whose spirits were still the same, was reminding Sartilly of the sudden turns of fortune in their expedition to the bay of Mont Saint Michel. Jottrat, very pale and with his arm in a sling, was listening to them, and at times trying to smile, but the deep sadness imprinted on his face was never to be entirely dispelled, his grief being one of those that time itself is powerless to cure.

"I did not lose my time yesterday," said Châteaubrun, "and I have at last obtained the rank of sergeant for our worthy friend the coastguard."

"Thanks, my dear fellow," said Sartilly, "I haven't forgotten him either. Yesterday he received the first instalment of the allowance I promised him."

"We could not do less, for without him I think we should have been drowned in the bay."

"Without counting that it was he who fished up the coffer. How thankful we ought to be to have saved our lives, and Roger's fortune as well!"

"Providence undoubtedly protects the deserving. Just ask our friend Jottrat."

The detective answered by an expressive look, while Sartilly repeated, sadly: "Roger,—ah! he alone is wanting to the happiness that God has sent us; but we shall never see him again."

"As for me, I still hope," replied Châteaubrun. But Sartilly shook his head, and fell into a deep reverie.

"Excuse me, sir," said Jottrat, "but isn't it to-morrow that the marriage contract is to be signed by you and Mademoiselle Jeanne?"

"Yes, to-morrow, at twelve o'clock," answered Sartilly, rather surprised by the question. "Monsieur Calmet, the notary, is to meet me at the house; and I hope his influence will overcome all Jeanne's scruples."

"What!" exclaimed the captain; "isn't it all yet arranged?"

"Well, Jeanne refuses to accept the fortune we brought back from Tombelaine. I have vainly showed her Roger's letter, explaining his intentions; she still persists in affirming that her brother isn't dead!"

"Mademoiselle de Mensignac is right," said Jottrat, gravely, whereupon Sartilly and Châteaubrun looked up in astonishment. "I have already told you, gentlemen," resumed the detective, "that I nearly perished in the place where Monsieur de Noreff confined me; now is the time to explain to you how I was saved. I was swimming without hope and felt all my strength leaving me, when a violent shock deprived me of consciousness. On recovering from it, I found that I was lying on a straw pallet, and by my side I saw a young man, who seemed to be waiting for my restoration to consciousness. I did not know him; but his mild and sympathetic face, and the first words he spoke, restored me to hope and courage. Above my head there was an immense vault, and the lamp that lighted us scarcely penetrated the darkness of a deep gallery. I was in the catacombs which extend under the Trocadéro hill, and Providence had placed me with the only man who could attach me again to life."

"What! Roger?" said Sartilly, breathless with emotion.

"Yes, the Marquis Roger de Mensignac, who, from the asylum where his enemies had compelled him to hide himself, watched over his sister and his friends."

"Then he is living!" cried the viscount, adding, with some hesitation, "and that murder committed in the library was not his deed?"

"That murder! The young man who committed it has expiated his crime, and I can now reveal to you the secret of that fatal night of the

13th of February. The marquis loved the sister of the woman who bore Noreff's name, and he was beloved in return. Vanda Ludloff wanted to escape from the wretches with whom destiny had connected her, and Roger de Mensignac thought he might find a temporary asylum for her in the caverns which he believed he alone knew the secret of. They were entered by a door concealed in the wall of the library—a steel door which opened and shut by means of a secret spring. Noreff—who had found out this spring a long time previously—took advantage of it to prepare an infamous trap, and Toby was chosen to perpetrate the crime. While yon were at the opera ball, he had time to go to the house and hide himself in a dark corner of the library. The two lovers arrived; opened the steel door leading to the vaults, and were going to shut it behind them, when Toby softly called 'Roger.' By an instinctive motion the unfortunate Vanda turned, putting her head forward. Toby then touched the spring, and the door slid laterally into its grooves. It was the work of an instant, and her head was severed from her body."

Sartilly could not restrain a cry of horror, while the captain rose up, shaking his fist as if Noreff had been before him.

"In reality they hoped to murder Monsieur de Mensignac in this manner," continued Jottrat; "they pursued him with the greatest tenacity, and that same night Noreff's agents searched the catacombs, which they entered by a secret passage communicating with the lonely house near the Quai de Billy. However, they only found there Vanda's headless corpse. The marquis, knowing an inaccessible place in the most distant part of the catacombs, took refuge there from the scoundrels who were hunting for him, and who would certainly have murdered him if he had fallen into their hands. However, they had not lost hope; day and night they mounted guard, making their rounds through the catacombs, and Monsieur de Mensignac more than once heard their voices and footsteps. Crouching in his hiding-place, where he had in advance stored some provisions in case Vanda were obliged to spend a few days there, he was able to wait, and it ended by his enemies' patience being worn out. On the evening of the rise of the Seine, when I was thrown fainting against the entrance of a sewer, the marquis had for the first time ventured to leave his hiding-place. He was about to swim down the river when Providence brought me within reach of his arm. He might have escaped but he preferred to save me, and God will reward him for it. Need I tell you any more? The book which I carried on my shoulder brought about an explanation between Monsieur de Mensignac and me."

"But, since the way was free, why did not Roger come here to reassure his sister?" cried Sartilly.

"He could not, for they again began prowling around us, and we were literally besieged. Besides, Monsieur de Mensignac was taken with a fever, which brought him almost to death's door. I could not leave him, and yet I knew that every hour's delay profited Noreff. One day, however, I escaped the watchfulness of our enemies, and stole out of my hiding place with the book."

"And you did not go and inform the police?"

"The marquis made me swear that I would only go to you. I ran to the Rue d'Astorg, and did not find you there. I would have waited, but the marquis's condition was such that I could not leave him alone; so I gave that precious volume seven to Antoine, and returned with all speed to the catacombs, which had become more accessible as the Seine had

fallen. I remained there until Monsieur de Mensignac was out of danger, and then I could at last think of punishing the murderers."

"But, then," said Sartilly, "all the scoundrels now being dead, Roger has nothing more to fear, and will come back to us?"

"The Marquis de Mensignac made me swear I would say nothing more than what I have just told you," replied Jottrat.

"Well, well, I have hit upon it," exclaimed the captain; "he is preparing a surprise for Mademoiselle de Mensignac, and will appear on the day of the contract, to bring about an explanation, as Jupiter does at the end of the Greek tragedies! There is a way of saying that in Latin, but I have forgotten my classics."

Jottrat smiled, without answering, and Sartilly understood that Châteaubrun had guessed aright.

## XIX

### RESURGAM.

It was noon, and a magnificent spring sun illumined the library of the Mensignac mansion. The vast room which had been the scene of so many terrible events looked almost gay in the bright light, and indeed it seemed as if misfortune had left the house, and as if nature were rejoicing at the return of happiness.

Jeanne, pale from long suffering, was seated at the large oaken table, wearing black garments which enhanced her dazzling beauty, and her eyes, surrounded by a brown circle, animated her sweet and somewhat melancholy face with a proud glow. She looked very charming. Opposite her, Sartilly, radiant with delight and hope, was gazing at her with loving eyes; while the captain, who now made part of the family, also had his seat hard by; he still had the same gay smile on his frank face, and there was only the solemn countenance of Monsieur Calmet the notary, stiff in his white choker, and busy fingering documents, to suggest that something of high importance was in question.

On the table, in an open casket, could be seen some bundles of yellow, stained bank-notes, which appeared to have been exposed to some destructive element. Their presence explained why the casket containing them had floated in the bay of Mont Saint Michel—its light weight having saved it, and it really seemed as if Roger had foreseen some such contingency, for if his treasure had consisted of gold and silver it would assuredly have been swallowed up by the sands. The notary had finished an inventory of this wealth, which was amply sufficient to pay all debts and to raise the house of Mensignac from apparent ruin. And now the man of the law was reading the marriage contract, which Sartilly and the captain barely listened to, Jeanne alone being attentive to the perusal.

When Monsieur Calmet had finished, there was a moment's silence, Châteaubrun twirling his moustache in an indifferent manner, while Sartilly affected a calmness which he certainly did not feel. "Thanks," said the young girl, at last, "for all the trouble you have taken to repair the misfortunes of our house; but I cannot sign this contract."

"Mademoiselle," said the notary, "I really don't see——"

"Excuse me," replied Jeanne in a firm voice, "this is not a question of business, and I wish to be sole judge of the honour of my house,"

"Jeaunc!" began Sartilly, in a suppliant tone of voice, but an expressive glance from the young girl silenced him. "This fortune you have brought me," she said, with increasing energy, "is not mine; it belongs to my brother, and he is living!"

"Well, yes!" said Sartilly; "I know that Roger is living. I am even expecting him; but, if he were here, he would tell you just what you have read in his letter; he would tell you that he intended this fortune for you. It was he who told me to go and fetch it at the peril of my life, and it was to guard it from the hereditary enemies of his family that he had buried it in the vaults of Tombelaine. Will you refuse to take advantage of it, to prevent the sale of the house in which you were both born?"

The young girl's face bore an expression of deep emotion, but she answered without wavering: "My brother will judge me."

"And if he does not return?" hazarded Sartilly, affecting a doubt which his tone of voice belied.

"Then," replied Jeanne, making a great effort—"then I will wait."

"And delay our wedding day? And you would resign yourself to living in some convent, far from those who love you—far from me?"

"I may die, perhaps, but I must act thus."

"No, Jeanne, you shall not die!" said a mild, grave voice, that proceeded from the end of the library.

The two friends started up as if they had been struck by an electric battery, and Jeanne held her hand to her heart to repress its beating. A man came slowly forward from the depths of the gallery, the bright light that penetrated through the large central window falling upon his tall form and his handsome pale face. The same name fell from the lips of all present: "Roger!" Yes, it was he, the prisoner of the catacombs, wasted by suffering, but radiant with happiness and hope.

There are scenes that are better imagined than decried. Jeanne and Roger remained for a long time in each other's arms, while Sartilly, crazy with delight, convulsively pressed the hand his friend held out to him. The captain, feeling very much disturbed, began swearing in a low voice; while the notary, now less occupied with the task of maintaining his dignity, wiped away a tear.

A month later, on one of those May mornings which shed all over Paris a perfume of happiness, the Viscount de Sartilly was married at the church of Saint Philippe du Roule to Mademoiselle Jeanne de Mensignac. The captain in his most brilliant uniform, acquitted himself grandly of his duties as the bridegroom's "best man," and his handsome face and elegant appearance were observed by many. However, most eyes were turned upon the Marquis Roger. A vague report of his mysterious adventures had been spread through society, and more than one noble lady thought that day of the accomplished cavalier who had for a time so strangely disappeared.

In the darkest corner of the church, a man, plainly clad, was weeping bitterly. It was Jottrat. Before the end of the year that followed the wedding he had relinquished his position at the Prefecture of Police, and since then he has seldom failed to dine on Thursdays with the Viscount and Viscountess de Sartilly. Thursday is the day when they entertain their intimate friends.

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